

WHAT IS MEMPHIS IN FINNISH?

Exploring Post-Modernism in Finnish
Interior Architecture through the phenomenon of the
Memphis Group

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Contents

| | |
|-----------|--|
| 6 - 7 | Abstract |
| 8 - 9 | Tiivistelmä |
| 10 - 17 | Foreword |
| 18 - 57 | 1. Introduction |
| | 1.1 Briefly on Post-Modernism |
| | 1.2 Ettore Sottsass |
| | 1.3 Italian Radical Design |
| 58 - 89 | 2. Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again |
| | 2.1 Playing the record again and again – Memphis begins |
| | 2.2 Design Manifesto of the young, drunk designers |
| | 2.3 Exhibiting Memphis |
| | 2.4 Love for Laminate |
| | 2.5 Memphis Mania |
| 90 - 139 | 3. Memphis and Finnish Post-Modernism |
| | 3.1 Finnish Post-Modernism |
| | 3.2 Memphis in Finland |
| | 3.3 Post-Modernism and Consumerism |
| | 3.4 The Three Post-Modern Musketeers |
| | 3.5 The influence of Memphis in Finnish Post-Modern Interior Architecture |
| 140 - 145 | 4. Conclusions: More general thoughts about Post-Modernism and Memphis in Finnish interior architecture |
| | 4.1 An overview of the research process |
| | 4.2 Post-Modernism and my personal career as an interior architect |
| 146 - 159 | References |
| 160-161 | Appendix |
| 162 | Acknowledgements |

Abstract

In this master’s thesis, I will present the topic of Post-Modernism, which I am going to examine within interior architecture in Finland between the 1980s and 1990s. The focus of this research is the phenomenon and design theory of Milan-based collective, Memphis, and its influence on Finnish Post-Modern interior architecture. Memphis was founded by Ettore Sottsass (1917–2007) in 1981. Shortly after their first exhibition in the same year, Memphis became famous after its establishment in 1981 by breaking the status quo of design with its exceptional and recognizable style. My research questions are:

What kind of phenomenon Memphis was?

How is the influence of Memphis shown in Finnish Post-Modern interior architecture?

This thesis is made as a literature review and consists of three case studies, carefully selected buildings which are examples that represent Finnish Post-Modernism. The following buildings which I have selected for this thesis are showing the Post-Modern architecture, furniture, and spatial design in a clear way that follows the aesthetics, ideology and theory of the Memphis Group. They are showing similarities between each other, such as in colors, materials and shapes as well. These selected buildings are Bepop Shopping Centre (1989, Nurmela-Raimoranta Tasa, now Architects NRT) in Pori, Sinikello Kindergarten (1987, Kari Virta, now VPL Architects) in Kuopio and Paimio Parish Centre (1984, Käpy and Simo Paavilainen Architects) in Paimio. Through these examples, I reflect and evaluate the Memphis ideology, theory and aesthetics in Finnish, Post-Modern interior architecture.

Besides the examples, the findings of this thesis are based on literature, online articles, conversations with experts about Post-Modern design in Finland. A wide spectrum of literature has been used to explore the history of Post-Modernism, to compare analyze various angles of Post-Modernism theories, Ettore Sottsass and Memphis Group. I have used online articles to support the literature and interviews with Eva Kajander and Jyrki Tasa to have a direct, straightforward approach towards the topic. These discussions are also giving a chance to be able to hear personal opinions from people working closely with Post-Modernism themselves.

First and foremost, as the Post-Modern design may be easy to recognize by its extraordinary style, this research is showing the furniture and spatial design through photography, advertising and publications. Finnish interior magazines from the 1980s and 1990s are presenting the Post-Modern design as easily approachable, and advertisements from manufacturers and brands show the well-defined and marketed version. In addition, these publications are showing the role of Post-Modern design in Finnish consumer culture.

Memphis was a phenomenon that was eye-catching and caused debate. Finnish Post-Modern interior architecture is not substantially related to the Memphis Group on a theoretical level, but physical elements indicate that Memphis was a possible source of inspiration. Also, Finnish Post-Modern interior architecture focused more on furniture design instead of spatial design.

Keywords:
postmodernism, Finnish postmodernism, architectural theory, interior architecture, furniture design, spatial design, Memphis, Ettore Sottsass

Tiivistelmä

Tämä taiteen maisterin opinnäytetyö tutkii postmodernia klassismia edustavaa sisustusarkkitehtuuria Suomessa 1980- ja 1990-luvuilla. Ettore Sottsassin (1917–2007) 1980-luvulla perustaman ja vaikuttaneen Memphis-ryhmän teorian ja ilmiön kautta päätarkoituksenani on selvittää, kuinka Memphis-ryhmän vaikutus on nähtävissä suomalaisessa, postmodernissa sisustusarkkitehtuurissa. Memphis-ryhmä nousi kuuluisuuteen perustamisensa jälkeen vuonna 1981 heidän rikottuaan rajoja omaperäisellä ja tunnusomaisella suunnittelullaan. Tutkimuskysymykseni ovat:

Millainen ilmiö Memphis oli?

Kuinka Memphis-ryhmän vaikutus näkyy suomalaisessa postmodernissa sisustusarkkitehtuurissa?

Tämä opinnäyte koostuu kirjallisuuskatsauksesta ja tapaustutkimuksesta. Tapaustutkimus kuvaa kolme tarkoin valittua kohdetta, jotka edustavat suomalaista, postmodernia arkkitehtuuria sekä tila- että kalustesuunnittelua. Opinnäytetyöhöni valitut tutkimuskohteet tuovat esiin postmodernia arkkitehtuuria, tila- ja kalustesuunnittelua selkeästi, mukaillen Memphis-ryhmän estetiikkaa, ideologiaa ja teoriaa samalla osoittaen samankaltaisuuksia keskenään; muun muassa väreissä, materiaaleissa ja muotokielessä. Nämä rakennukset ovat Kauppakeskus Bepop (1989, Nurmela-Raimoranta-Tasa, nyk. Arkkitehdit NRT) Porissa, Päiväkotit Sinikello (1987, Arkkitehtitoimisto Kari Virta) Kuopiossa sekä Paimion Seurakuntakeskus (1984, Käpy ja Simo Paavilainen) Paimiossa. Näiden esimerkkien avulla reflektoin ja vertailen Memphisin ideologiaa, teoriaa sekä estetiikkaa suomalaisessa, postmodernissa sisustusarkkitehtuurissa.

Edellä mainittujen esimerkkikohteiden lisäksi opinnäytteen päätelmät perustuvat kirjallisuuteen, verkkoartikkeleihin sekä keskusteluihin asiantuntijoiden kanssa postmodernistisesta suunnittelusta Suomessa. Kirjallisuutta on käytetty tutkimaan postmodernismin historiaa, vertailemaan ja analysoimaan postmodernismin erilaisia teorioita sekä Ettore Sottsassia ja Memphis -ryhmää. Verkkolähteet tukevat kirjallisuuslähteitä ja asiantuntijoiden – Eva Kajanderin sekä Jyrki Tasan – kanssa käydyt haastattelut antavat suoran lähestymistavan aiheeseen; mahdollisuuden kuulla henkilökohtaisia mielipiteitä sekä ajatuksia postmodernismin parissa työskennelleiltä henkilöiltä.

Koska postmoderni design on mahdollista tunnistaa ennen kaikkea sen omalaatuisesta tyylistään, tämä opinnäytetyö lähestyy postmodernia tila- ja kalustesuunnittelua myös valokuvien, mainonnan sekä suomalaisten, 1980-1990 -luvulla julkaistujen sisustuslehtien kautta. Näiden aineistojen avulla postmodernismi näyttäytyy selkeästi valmistajien mainonnassa, korostaen omaa, postmodernia tyyliään. Lisäksi sisustuslehtien julkaisut näyttävät postmodernin suunnittelun roolin suomalaisessa kuluttajakulttuurissa.

Memphis oli ilmiönä huomiota herättävä ja aiheutti keskustelua. Suomalainen postmodernisisustusarkkitehtuurieioleoleellisesti tai teoreettisesti yhteydessä Memphis -ryhmään, mutta fyysiset ominaisuudet viittaavat Memphisin olleen mahdollinen inspiraation lähde. Lisäksi suomalainen postmoderni sisustusarkkitehtuuri keskittyy enemmän kaluste- kuin tilasuunnitteluun.

Avainsanat:

postmodernismi, suomalainen postmodernismi, arkkitehtuurin teoria, sisustusarkkitehtuuri, kalustesuunnittelu, tilasuunnittelu, Memphis, Ettore Sottsass

Foreword



The golden era of shoulder pads, fluorescent colors and Miami Vice – these are some of my very first, personal associations of the 1980s. Even though the above-mentioned visions are generally associated with fashion and entertainment industry, the features and characteristics may as well be observed in the fields of architecture, furniture and spatial design. Geometric and free-formed shapes, unconventional color palettes and experimental material compositions represent design that took place in the 1980s – which goes by the name of Post-Modernism.

My personal attraction towards Post-Modernism

Photography has always been a great interest for me, which I can see it as an important connection to architecture and interiors. It allows me to capture and observe the relationship, behaviour, and interaction between human beings and space behind the lens. I began my personal and more individual relationship with Post-Modernism three years ago when I was working in the Museum of Finnish Architecture as an architectural photographer. My assignment was to photograph Finnish, Post-Modern architecture for the archive of the museum. During my journey of photographing in the neighborhoods and outskirts of Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa, I got a glimpse, a preview, of what Post-

Modernism in Finland is today. Nevertheless, I must admit that at the very beginning of this task, I did consider Post-Modernism as a hideous, bit forgotten – or even neglected – phenomenon in the history of Finnish architecture and design. But after my position was in progress, I started to realize that this extraordinary style with its personal and recognizable elements – such as colors, shapes and materials – was, after all, a beautiful and open-minded composition of aesthetics. However, this style and movement in both architecture and design seems a little neglected and overshadowed by the Modernist and Minimalist design.

I became progressively curious to discover what Post-Modernism could be in Finnish interior architecture and furniture design. Currently, the Post-Modern style is easier to recognize in the forms of different buildings – but how do they look inside? Are the spaces something more than walls covered in pastel colors and a mishmash of glass bricks, bright upholsteries and ceramic tiles?



Fig. 02

Memphis – the Post-Modern eye candy

Design Museum in Helsinki launched its Post-Modern retrospective in 2015 and I remember finding this exhibition attractive. It impacted me by bringing the Post-Modern style and way of thinking closer to my thoughts about becoming an interior architect. It made me think about what my duty as a designer is: How much independence I may have in the design process? Where goes the limit of breaking the norms? The objects of this retrospective represented the independence and boldness – or even rule-breaking – that you were able to do with Post-Modern style – especially break the norms and disregarding Modernism. The exhibition gave me my first, face to face encounter with the beauty of the Memphis Group.

What I find interesting in Memphis's design, in particular, is their ability to create emotional and exciting experiences for the users through interesting features and elements – such as asymmetric dimensions, forms and colors, to mention but a few. For me, Memphis represents a visibly strong design ideology that creates sculpture-like objects, which may not be even seen as furniture even though an object would be a bookshelf. Memphis was a rapid glimpse in the era of Post-Modernism, a group of young designers, whose influence and phenomenon on design still lives in the present day.

Objectives

In this thesis, I aim to bring up Post-Modernism back to the discussion about Finnish interior architecture and enlighten the influence and effect that Post-Modernism and Memphis have brought to the Finnish design as a whole. Hopefully, this research may be an inspiring text for designers, architects, and anyone interested to learn about the Finnish Post-Modernism in interior architecture, since it has not been spoken to yet though the design theory and phenomenon of the Memphis Group.

Research Questions

My research questions are the following:

What kind of phenomenon Memphis was?

How is the influence of Memphis shown in Finnish Post-Modern interior architecture?

With the first question, I will examine the history of the Memphis Group leader Ettore Sottsass himself, why and how did he establish Memphis and what was the main idea, intention and theory. In addition, my aim is to find out what was the public reaction to Memphis and what kind of phenomenon it created.

The second question focuses on how Memphis together with its design theory, ideology and phenomenon are shown in Finnish Post-Modern interior architecture. I will shortly introduce the arrival of Post-Modernism to Finland and examine the typical characteristics of Finnish Post-Modernism. To do such examination, I have chosen three Post-Modern buildings as my case studies. To dive deeper into Memphis, I will concentrate on how Memphis was available and known in Finland and whether Memphis ever made a breakthrough in Finnish design.

Methods

The method which I am using in this thesis is a literature review, including theoretical literature and journalistic texts, such as online articles. The thesis includes two interviews made in a semi-structured method, which includes questions customized for the interviewees. These professionals whom I will interview, are architect Jyrki Tasa from NRT Architects, who designed the Bepop shopping centre in Pori, and Eva Kajander, the store manager of Helsinki-based design furniture store Funktio, which imported Memphis furniture to Finland in the 1980s. Funktio was established in 1968 by interior architect Alli Syvänoja (1924–2014). I will interview Kajander about Ettore Sottsass's visit to Finland, Funktio's customers, about whether the Memphis design objects got sold and how was Post-Modern furniture adopted to Finnish homes.

In addition, this thesis presents the three case studies, the Finnish Post-Modern examples, are examined and analyzed based on my personal study trips and capturing the spaces through photography. These selected buildings are Bepop Shopping Centre (1989) in Pori, Sinikello Kindergarten (1987) in Kuopio and Paimio Parish Centre (1984) in Paimio. Through these examples, I reflect and evaluate the Memphis ideology, theory and aesthetics in Finnish, Post-Modern interior architecture.



Fig. 04

Structure

The thesis is structured as follows. At first, I will present a brief history of Post-Modernism, including main Post-Modern theories by Robert Venturi and Charles Jencks. These theorists were involved in the first Venice Biennale in 1980, which enlightened Post-Modernism and augmented its status in the international, architectural discussion, and as a leading style of design throughout the 1980s.

Secondly, I will first introduce a brief biography of Ettore Sottsass – the leading designer of Memphis. In addition, I will take a look at Radical Design, which boomed in the 1960s and 1970s, which included various designer collectives in Italy. This makes it clear to understand, how the memoir of Sottsass, history of Post-Modern theories, the first Biennale of Venice and Radical Design have not only shaped the Post-Modern architecture and design but also provide a solid basis for experiencing Memphis and Post-Modern interior architecture in Finland.

Thirdly, I will describe and open up how the Memphis Group began in the 1980s and what was the main purpose, the ideology behind the collective, and the reception and phenomena they accomplished. To clarify the design of Memphis, I will, in addition, examine the physical elements of their design: colors, materials, shapes and types of furniture. Thereafter, I will turn my focus on introducing Finnish Post-Modernism. By familiarizing the beginning of the Post-Modern epoch, I will explain how Post-Modernism is shown in Finnish design and architecture. I will thereafter take a look at how especially Memphis, but also other Post-Modern furniture appear in Finnish consumer culture, sales and marketing.

Lastly, I will introduce three examples of Finnish Post-Modern spaces. These examples show Post-Modernism concretely in-built environments. In addition, by visiting these locations myself I am able to analyze and record the spaces and examine what kind of Post-Modern elements these examples have and what kind of similarities they might have with Memphis design.



Fig. 05

Introduction



1.1 Briefly on Post-Modernism

1.1 Briefly on Post-Modernism

Post-Modernism is a wide-ranging umbrella term embracing interdisciplinary, philosophical and cultural phenomena, which may be perceived as a counterrevolution against the Modernist theories and values. It is also a portrayal of the period that followed the Modernist era, known for its dominance in cultural theory and practice. (Tate Modern n.d) It is a concept, which encompasses everything that has been and will be reactions towards Modernism (Sassi 1985, 64). When it comes to architecture and design, Post-Modernism is often associated with eclecticism, irony and tongue-in-cheek approaching movement and style, which has given it the recognizable appearance in architecture and design. Though Post-Modernism is often associated with the late 20th century, it had inaugurated to evolve already in the 1960s.

More is not less – beginning Post-Modern discourse

In 1966, architect Robert Venturi (1925–2018) wrote *The Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*; a book, which presented the “*less is more*” quotation – often associated with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969) – rewritten as “*less is a bore*” (Venturi 2006, 47). These words which Venturi declared, expressed a new way of thinking, which was later seen as the cornerstone of Post-Modernism. Venturi’s debut – now published over 50 years ago – has been described as a book which changed essentially how we see, believe and discuss about architecture (Stierli 2016). Venturi describes himself favoring the meaning of richness instead of clarity of meaning, preferring all-embracing, implicit mentality “*both-and*” rather than

explicit “*either-or*” (Venturi 2006, 42). Although his text analyzes and describes the new way of thinking and making of architecture, which has attributes of Post-Modernism, Venturi himself does not mention the word Post-Modernism at any point in his epoch. Even though there was not yet an actual name or pure concept for his theory, Venturi delivers an encouraging manifest in his writing. His radical thinking that encourages architects to step out of their intolerant, dogmatic and uncompromising Modernist roles aiming to perfectionism, is perhaps an essential element in Venturi’s thinking (Vartola 2014, 95).



Fig. 07: Vanna Venturi House in Philadelphia, US. Robert Venturi in 1964. The house is considered as the first building representing Post-Modernism.

When the main, tentative concept and ideology of Post-Modernism was coming into being, it did not take long when the criticism and varying opinions about this new style and movement began to spread. Even though everyone’s ideas may vary from side to side, the context created by Venturi had given an impact for advocates of Post-modernism to create not only visual but theoretical responses and acknowledgments to their ideology (Winston 2015). Charles Jencks (1939–2019), an American landscape architect and author, was a passionate and one of the most recognized theorists of Post-Modernism. During his 50-year career, he published over 30 books about architecture, writing and rewriting the history of architecture of the 20th century. Jencks created his constantly developing evolutionary tree – a diagram, visualizing the architectural movements and architects connected together in strangely shaped lumps (Wainwright 2019). Jencks’ tree is a good overview of Post-Modernism, giving a clear sight of what Post-Modernism is. According to Sudjic (2014, 138), Jencks’s theory about Post-Modernism was more radical, and he went further than Venturi, telling Modernism to be dead on arrival, instead of agreeing with Venturi’s “*less is a bore*.” Jencks had a more fundamental vision of the beginning of Post-Modernism. He was quite profound with thoughts on architecture. In his bestseller and a symbolic status book, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (1984, 9), Jencks specifies the end of Modernism followingly:



“Modern Architecture died in St. Louis, Missouri on July 15, 1972 at 3.32 p.m. (or thereabouts) when the infamous Pruitt-Igoe scheme, or rather several of its slab blocks, were given the final coup de grâce by dynamite.”

By this, Jencks is referring to an infamous housing estate, Pruitt-Igoe, designed by architect Minoru Yamasaki (1913–1986), which was blown up after being damaged and vandalized endlessly until its demolition. Described as a Modernist dream-come-true, which would replace the slums with new, clean and reasonably priced living (Cendón 2012). Modernism was insurrection target of Post-Modernists and described as a fossilized establishment (Winston 2015). Jencks interprets this blown-up Modernist complex not only as of the death of Modern architecture but also as a presentation of dying values and theories that Modernism represented. Charles Jencks has described, in his perception, that Post-Modernism is an etiquette, valid for a few hundred years; endured or not, he claims Post-Modernism has taken root as an ideology, philosophy and design method (Sassi 1985, 64).



Fig. 09

Theory and Irony

During the late 1970s, the concept of Post-Modernism began to take shape and, later on, architectural debate on Post-Modernism augmented its significance and interest among architects and designers. Robert Hughes described Post-Modernism in his article “Doing Their Own Thing” published by the Time in 1979. He announced that in the 1970s Modernism was fading away. Hughes claims, that young architects do not follow certain ideology or style in the same way as e.g. the Bauhaus or corporate architects in the 1950s America used to – mutual style does not exist among them any longer. Although, the style of these young architects may vary from side to side, there seems to be a need for regularly assembling them under a specific umbrella phrase, “Post-

Modernism”. (Hughes 1979) The term began to stand out and settle in to describe the new phenomenon in the architectural discussion and appear as a style in architecture and design.

Post-Modernism can be visualized is a pastiche combining different aspects and including a number of styles and ideologies. According to Sassi (1985, 142), diversity is a key feature of Post-Modernism, and it may be interpreted from different viewpoints. For instance, the message that Post-Modern building, space or furniture want to deliver, can simultaneously be poetic and banal or sentimental and intelligent.



Fig. 10

Instead of following the Modernist, plain and unattractive design, Post-Modernists presented something as diverse and individual as people are by one's own (Winston 2015). Moreover, while Modernists aimed to utopia and industrial, machine-like excellence with their design, the Post-Modernists were a complete antithesis with their design, which both bailed out and distressed material (V&A Museum n.d).

According to Charles Jencks (1984, 5), Modernism is still present in Post-Modern in terms of emotional response and in the use of technology. The existence of Modernism, however, happens in new, altered forms, frequently in an ironic manner (Collins & Papadakis 1989, 11–12). Frederic Jameson described the difference of Modernism and Post-Modernism ironically by saying “*It is like the transition from precious metals to the credit card*” while referring to the opposing views of the two movements (McGuirk 2011). Post-Modernism presented a contemporary vision, where history becomes an unending stockroom of ideas and sketches, which architects and designers can freely get in to receive inspiration for their style (Architecture Biennale Wiki n.d). Post-Modernism can be alleged as a movement and style, combining aesthetics of both old and new, tragedy and irony. This way of thinking supports the Pluralist “double-coding” theory of Charles Jencks, which defines Post-Modernism as a hybrid and based on vital duality (Jencks 1985, 5).



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

La Strada Novissima

Post-Modernism had been criticized, named, build and destroyed in the late 1970s. Various actions and utterances had been pointed out (Jencks 2011, 74). Post-Modernism had commenced as a radical movement, but later shored up its position in ranking, by becoming the dominant look of the 1980s (V&A Museum n.d). The debate on Post-Modernism and its languages of expression began to culminate and rise to the public discussion. The first, international architectural exhibition, *La Presenza del Passato* (The Presence of the Past) opened to the public on 27th of July 1980 at the Venice Architecture Biennale, and it presented Post-Modernism in its own glory.

Curated by Paolo Portoghesi (b. 1931), the exhibition disputedly introduced the idea of Post-Modernism as a supermarket of styles. (Szacka 2011, 133) The most notable section of the whole exhibition was the *La Strada Novissima*, which embodied an artificial boulevard of Post-Modernism with twenty facades designed by an equivalent number of international architects (Architecture Biennale Wiki n.d).

This avenue of facades was 70 meters long which had ten, 7 meters wide and 9 meters tall facades on each side. Behind each facade was a small booth, where every architect presented their production as a treatise display. (Architecture Biennale Wiki n.d; Bigmat international Architecture Agenda 2018).

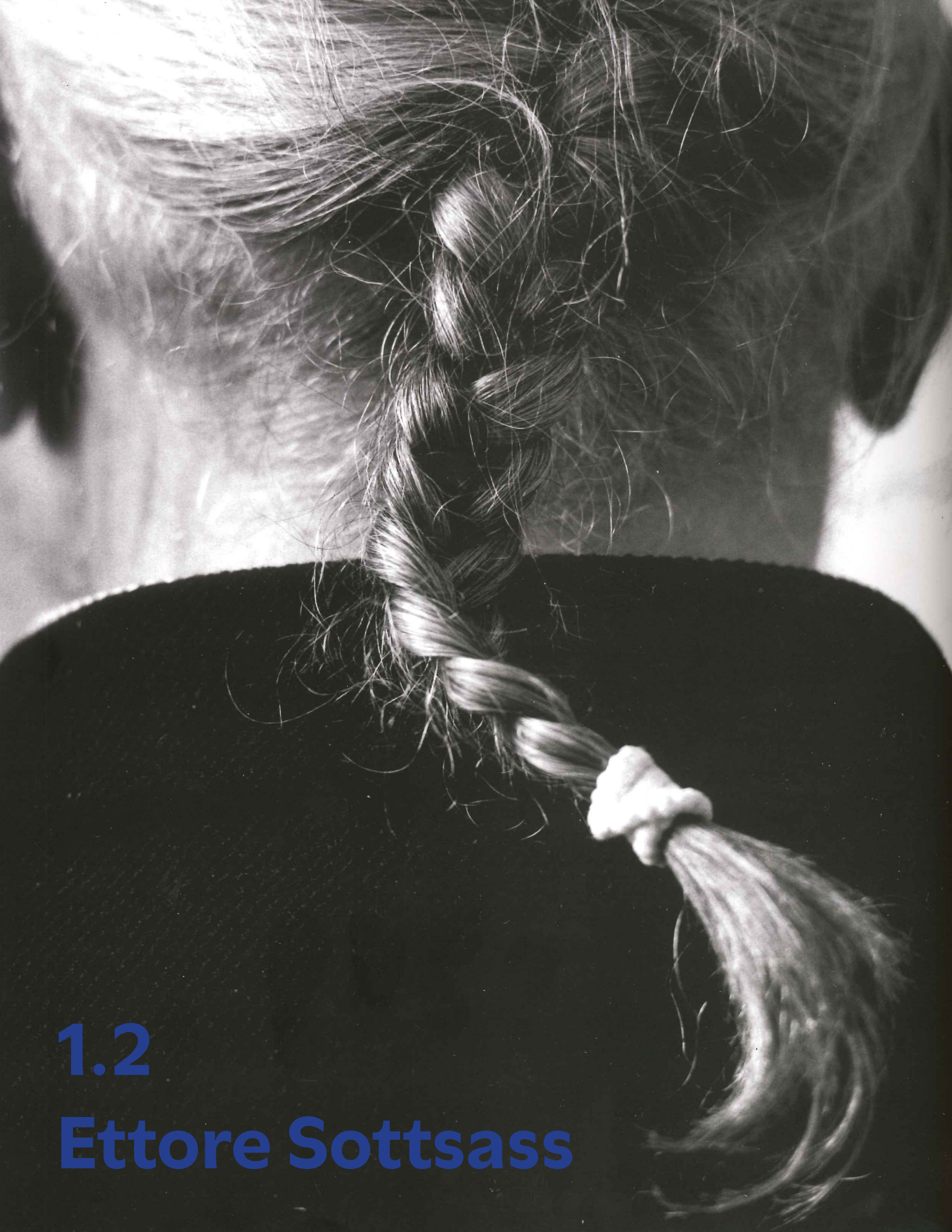
The architects, who attended the La Strada Novissima were some of the most honored architects of the time, inter alia Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, Michael Graves, Hans Hollein, Arata Isozaki and Portoghesi himself.

Nearly 40 000 people visited the exhibition at the Biennale, which was an exceptionally high number of visitors for an architectural exhibition. What made the exhibition alluring, was the contradictory position in between the informative and the thematic; and despite the strong influence of Post-Modernism, each façade presented the work of every architect in their own terms. (Szacka 2011, 135) These façades gave distinctive views on the language of architecture which the architects presented in their own style, together with their artistic and ideological

impressions. These characteristic styles were later shown in design as well, when some of the architects, including Hans Hollein, Arata Isozaki and Michael Graves designed furniture for the Memphis Group.

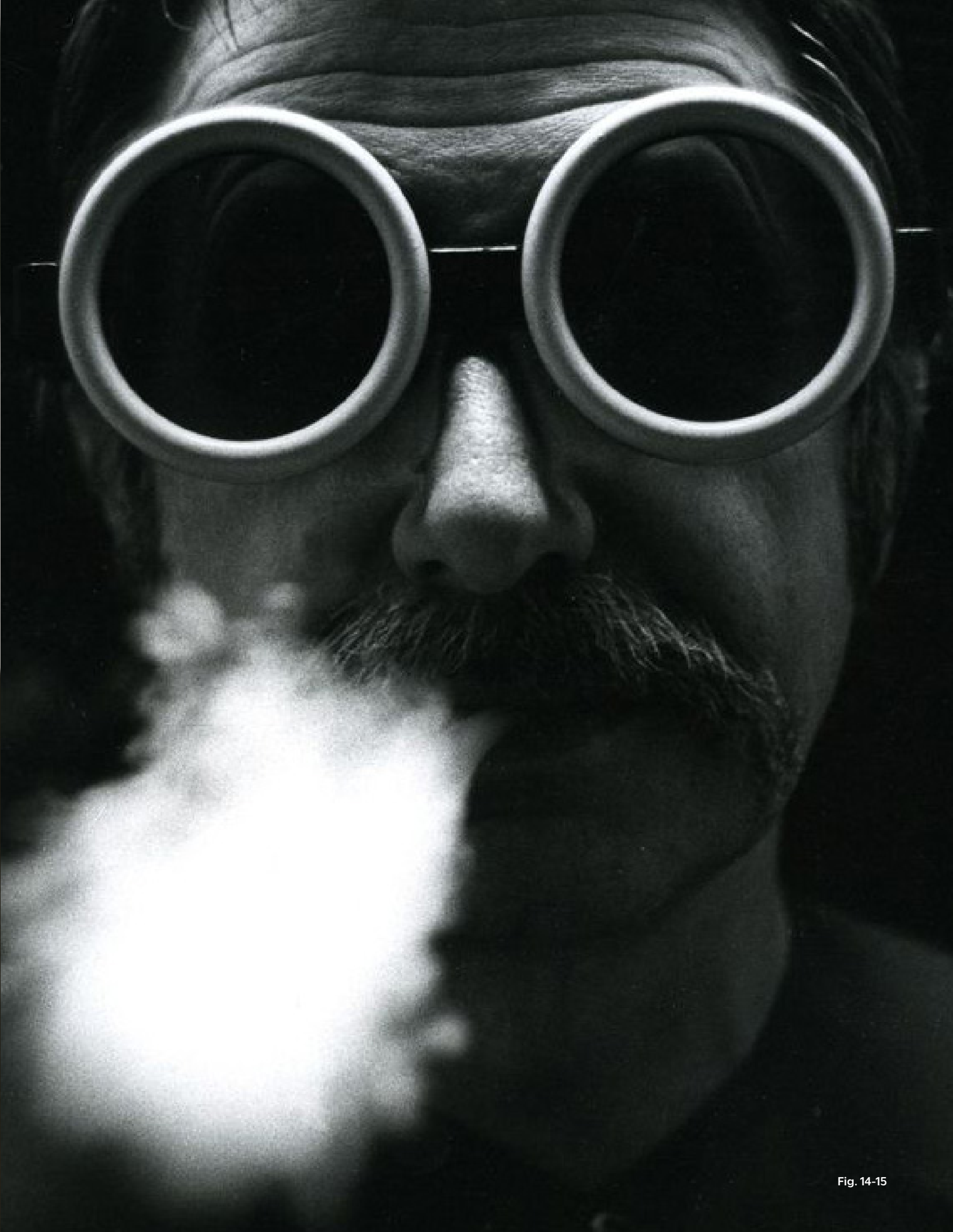


Fig. 13



1.2

Ettore Sottsass



1.2 Ettore Sottsass

Austrian-born, Italian architect and designer Ettore Sottsass Jr. (1917–2007) has a wide-ranging history in the fields of design and architecture. His work may be considered outstanding and one-of-a-kind in the field of Post-Modern architecture and design. Despite the reaction of the media and press towards his 60-year professional career, Sottsass's design has been described – by and large – as “*paradigm-shifting*” to “*ground-breaking*” and “*experimental*” and cherished as a breaker of the canon of traditional design of interiors and furniture (Pearce 2017).

Early life and interest towards design

Sottsass's curiosity and passion towards design started already as a child, while observing his father sketching – or “*doing a kind of silent ballet*” – as he called it himself (Sudjic 2015, 29). Symbols and signs have been a great fascination during the whole lifetime of Sottsass. This lifelong pursue might be possible to recognize in his commitment to experience his milieu, which has changed during his lifetime and practice. In addition to the artistic character of Sottsass's father, contemporary painters – such as Picasso, Matisse, Kandinsky and Mondrian – strongly inspired Sottsass during his examinations at Polytechnic. In the drawings which he prepared for the submission is potential to observe his ideas about color and space influenced by these artists. (Burney 1991, 52) Even though Sottsass had a great interest towards colors when he mulled over a career as an artist, he claimed himself as better with colors in spaces (Sudjic 2014, 12). Later, the use of multiple colors, organic and geometrical forms have sculpted his profession as the leading designer of Memphis and his projects including interiors and furniture.



Fig. 16

Sottsass began his architectural studies in the Polytechnic in Turin in 1934 and graduated at age of 22 in 1939 (Burney 1991, 27; 29). Even though he studied to become an architect, his profession was focusing on interiors, furniture and product design. After his graduation, Sottsass began working as an architect-designer for Fiat, not only to gain experience, but in order to reschedule his feasible military service in the Second World War. However, his occupation at Fiat ended quickly after he was sent for his service to Yugoslavia. (Burney 1991, 40; 45) Photography has been a powerful curiosity for Sottsass during his whole lifetime, and he captured the surroundings of Montenegro during the War.

Sottsass himself describes the wartime followingly: “*I longed for someone to comfort me during those futile squandered years. -- I looked for sympathy from refugees, deserters, traitors and prisoners and even from the enemy; the other soldiers who were just as blameless as me*” (Sottsass 1996, 11).

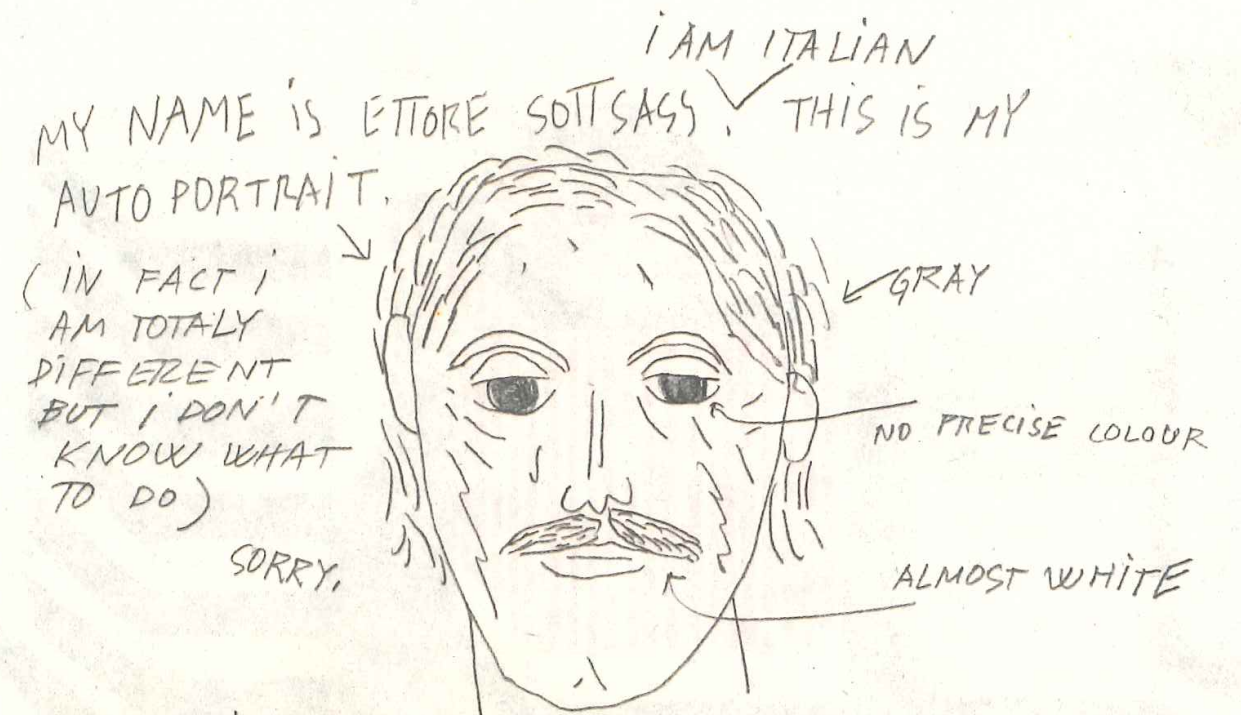
Post-war life from the US to India



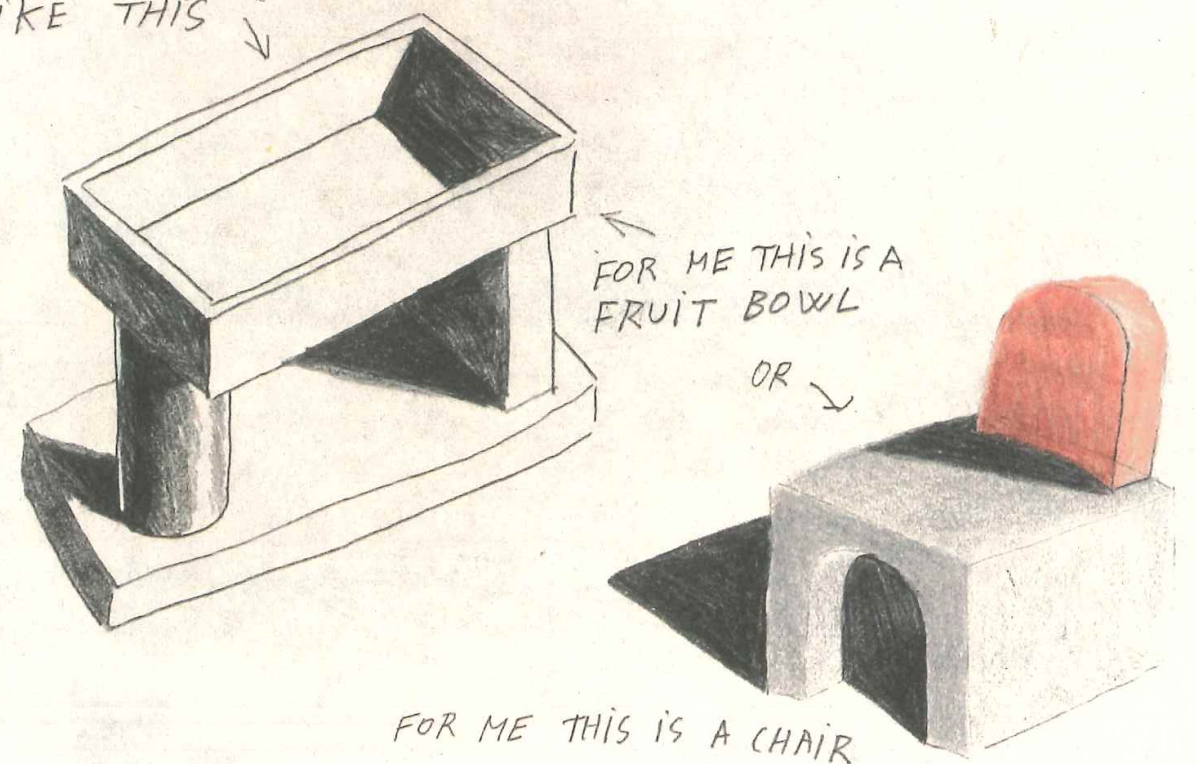
Fig. 17

Shortly after the war, Sottsass moved to Milan in 1946. For him, Milan was city where he felt the opportunities for design in a pragmatic value were constantly increasing. (Burney 1991, 54.) He inaugurated his own architectural practice in 1946 (Collins 1987, 165). The establishment led Sottsass to begin his personal, recognizable style, which characterizes his philosophy of intelligence and functionalism in his emblematic pieces of furniture and astonishing interiors. But not only was Sottsass based in Milano after the War. The post-war lifetime of Sottsass has had a variety of periods outside Italy which have influenced his ideology as designer in the future. On March 1956, he travelled the first time to the United States, current center of consumerism and industrial

production (Burney 1991, 13; Sudjic 2015, 115). There, he became aware of the American Modernism, which showed 'production' as a significant, cultural phenomenon where production processes fused together with creative expressions, placing the practicality as walk-on. (Marres Centre for Contemporary Culture n.d) This could be one of the reasons, why his later establishment, Memphis, did not apply for such profitable and commercial status. In addition, Sottsass told that as a young individual, everything about design was only functionalism – "It's not enough. Design should also be sensual and exciting" (Howarth 2015a).



I AM AN ARCHITECT, BUT MOSTLY I DO DESIGN, (I MEAN SO CALLED INDUSTRIAL DESIGN) WHICH MEANS MACHINES, COMPUTERS, FURNITURE, OBJECTS, LAMPS; ALSO CERAMICS, GLASS, SILVER, STONE, ETC. ALL MY DESIGNS LOOK LIKE SMALL ARCHITECTURES LIKE THIS



MANY YEARS AGO I DESIGNED SOME FURNITURE THAT LOOKED LIKE TOWERS, MORE OR LESS. BUT THAT HAPPENED BECAUSE I WAS INFLUENCED BY THE POP ART

Fig. 18



Fig. 19

Later, Sottsass's ability to collect the characteristics of both fine art and popular culture in an effortless way to create his remarkable design has helped him to epitomize Memphis, by combining the high and low cultures (Burney 1991, 79).

In addition to the United States, another important destination for Sottsass was India where travelled the first time in 1961. Dazzled by the country, Sottsass later visited India because of his curiosity towards its culture. He was highly enthusiastic about the non-monotheistic culture and became interested in the colorful and geometrically shaped Indian buildings (Sudjic 2015, 148; Beauchesne 2017). Unfortunately, Sottsass came severely ill with kidney disease after his journey but survived after being hospitalized for an extended period (Burney 1991, 92). Afterward he focused on recovering from his almost fatal suffering by experiencing arts and ceramics.



First and foremost, to show his gratitude and faithfulness, Sottsass created a series of one hundred ceramics plates named *Offerta a Shiva* (Offerings to Shiva) in 1964, which portrayed his spiritual side and thankfulness towards the Hindu gods. The Indian spirit followed Sottsass during his design career (Burney 1991, 98). Notwithstanding, India might seem like the most important country for Sottsass to be inspired, but the United States followed him as well.

The influence of these two countries with their contrasting cultures is merged in more than a few of Sottsass's work and design. Physically this is noticeable in his work between 1965-1966, when the collection of twenty-one ceramic totems named *Menhir*, *Ziggurat*,

Stupas, *Hydrants* & *Gas Pumps* was exhibited. These over two-meter-high totems are representing contemporary political, communal or social and spiritual concerns (The Metropolitan Museum of Art n.d). Sottsass journeys to the East also taught him of design, which he portrayed for *Domus* in 1961. He described that design does not relate to the existence of objects as such, but to the chance of their presence in contact with a particular psychological or cultural atmosphere (Thomé 2014, 149).

Fig. 20: Offerta a Shiva by Sottsass

The Shiva ceramics illustrated his return to the physical condition and creative life. This specific Hindu god is often portrayed as phallus symbol "lingam" which Sottsass was introduced during his visits to India and which is shown on these ceramic plates as well. (Howarth 2014)



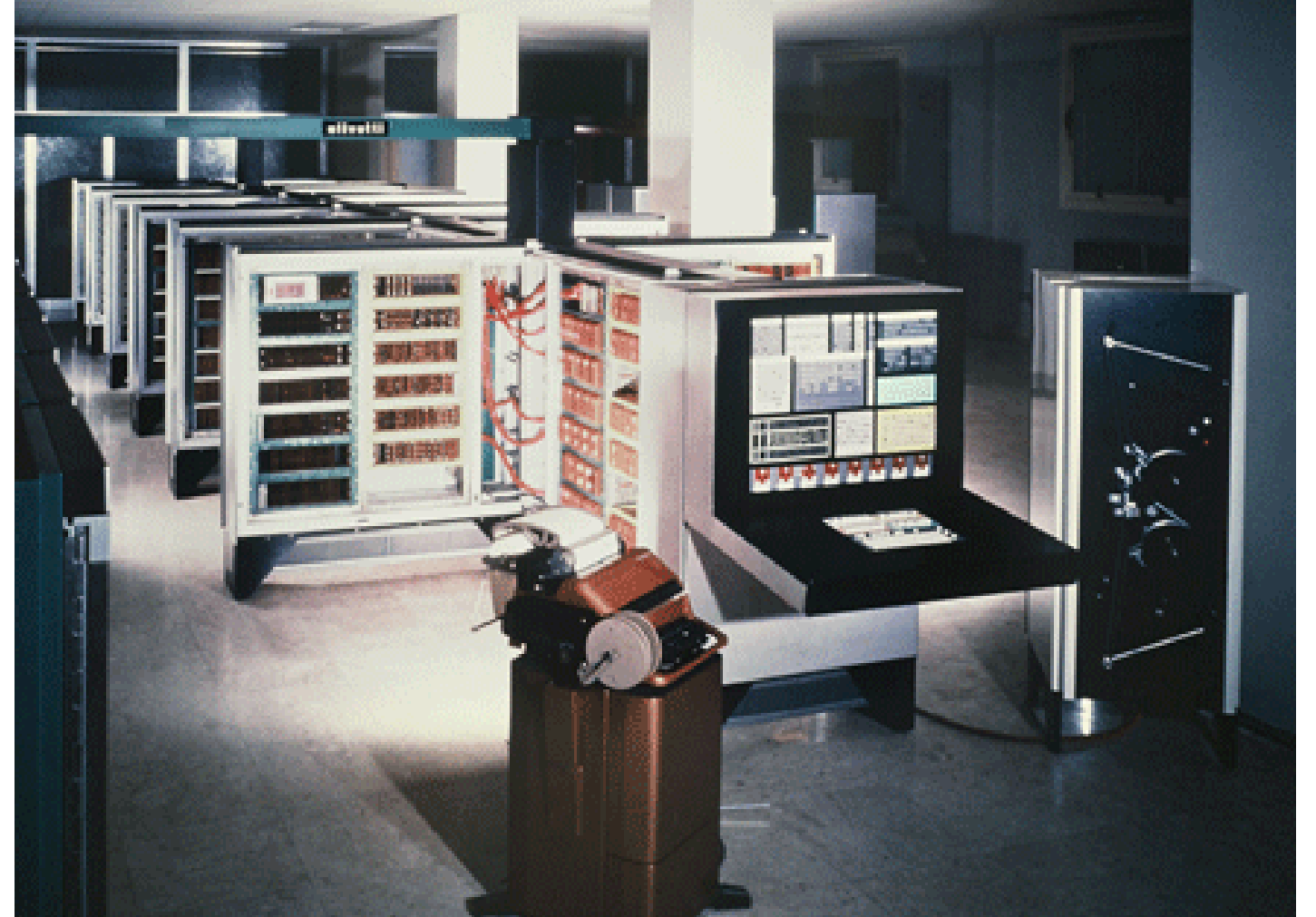
Launching the career – Olivetti & Poltronova

Sottsass's approach for the design process is rather artistic – or even theatrical. He pictures the work of a designer as a performance – no matter if it is a comedy or a tragedy – which has a beginning, narrative development, and finale to follow (Burney 1991, 22). In 1958 Sottsass began to work as a designer at Olivetti and worked for the company until the late 1960s (Collins 1987, 165). The importance of human interaction with an object or device, together with the significance of technology is present in his design for the company (Pearce 2017). A year after his start, together with Roberto Olivetti and Mario Tchou, he won the industrial design award *Compasso d'Oro* for the design of the *Elea 9003* mainframe in 1959 (Radice 1993, 58; Readymag n.d). What makes

the design process of the *Elea 9003* remarkable and interesting is the Sottsass's approach towards designing a computer. He did not deal with the computer only as an intelligent machine – he treated it as it was a piece of easily transportable furniture, without concrete, visual elements of a computer (Sudjic 2014, 409). As the mainframes were immense by their sizes, Sottsass followed his tradition of always sketching the objects in a space.¹

The genuine and biggest success of Sottsass at Olivetti was the *Valentine* typewriter designed in 1969, and according to a publication

¹"When Ettore designed an object, he would always insert it in a space. He would always draw a room around it, as if he thought of it as already being placed in a space" (James Irvine in Thomé 2014, 7).



of Readymag about Sottsass's life, it was nicknamed as "*a simple little toy*" by Sottsass himself (Readymag n.d). *Valentine* became the most popular designs of Olivetti and nearly a synonym for Sottsass. Playfulness, which later is shown on the Memphis furniture, was close to Sottsass at Olivetti. Especially this liveliness is present in *Valentine* since he ironically portrayed the colors of the typewriter as the color of the Socialist flag, the color that makes a surgeon move quicker and the color of desire (Bayley 2008). As the *Valentine* typewriter became a success for Olivetti, it can simultaneously be viewed as a Post-Modern object – in a certain level – because its communicative purpose significantly outshined its range of capabilities and functionality (Picchi 2014, 16).

What made Sottsass's work at Olivetti remarkable was his ability to create identities and unique designs for the objects. Also, Sottsass's design is involving similarities which may be seen in his subsequent Radical design, which later became more important in his career. For instance, his furniture is not only resembling visual monumentality but visionary and theoretical background (Burney 1991, 88-89).

Fig. 21: Valentine Typewriter

Mostly made out of glossy ABS plastic, this bold and bright, red lipstick colored portable typewriter was beautiful, extraordinary piece with its orange scrolling caps shaped like nipples in the market of typewriters and continues as the most-wanted piece of collectors.

Fig. 22: Elea 9003 Mainframe

Sottsass's commission was to create a unique identity for the mainframe, which he started with giving the name 'Elea' after an Ancient Greek city-state that used to be on the mainland of Italy, with pre-Socratic philosophy of its own. (Sudjic 2014, 409)

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Fig. 23

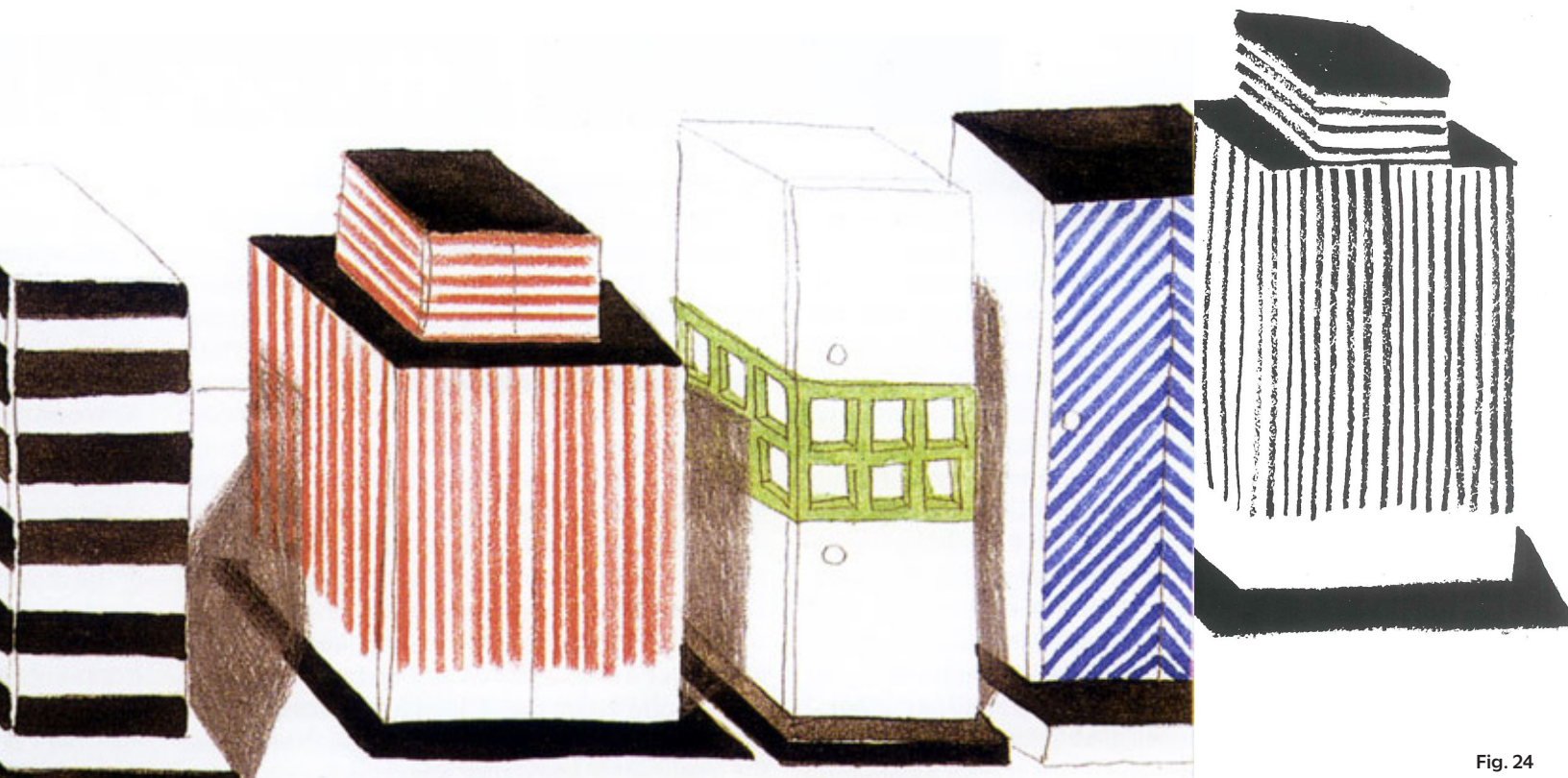


Fig. 24

In 1958, while working simultaneously for Olivetti, Sottsass became the creative director of Italian furniture manufacturer Poltronova. His design at Poltronova became increasingly experimental (Vitra Design Museum n.d). Sottsass's breakthrough at Poltronova were the *Superboxes*, a small collection of towering wardrobes and storage units that were inspired by Sottsass's journeys in the US and India. Designed in 1965, the Superboxes were resembling American pop and urban culture by their colors and patterns – mimicking candy stripes and gas stations. But these physical features were not alone since the symbolic aspects of the Superboxes were present as well.

Sottsass himself had described that placing such totemic furniture in the middle of space makes it a thematic character, which may be seen as an impression coming from India (Radice 1993, 148). The emblematic elements were enhanced in the design of the Superbox by making them free-standing, monumental objects, which were intended to be seen as altars for domestic rituals (Burney 1991, 105; Finkel 2006). The creative directing career at Poltronova gave Sottsass a chance of beginning to develop the signature style, combining flamboyant colors and peculiar forms (Vitra Design Museum n.d). It later assisted Sottsass with Memphis, not only as a potential inspiration but as a test of material possibilities² (Sudjic 2015, 173).

Significantly, the Superbox units were covered in plastic laminate – the material which soon would become the most important material of the Memphis Group. Also, without a doubt, Superbox cabinets are amongst the primary objects to prefigure the future production of Memphis with their colors, geometric shapes, and taste for motif (FRAC Centre Val de Loire n.d).



Fig. 25

²Abet Laminati is an Italian company which provided plastic laminate for Poltronova, for the experimentation of Superboxes and later for Memphis.

1.3 Italian Radical Design



1.3 Italian Radical Design

Sottsass’s role in the Italian Radical Design is a quite brief period but marked a significant time in his career. The design processes and new experiments did have an impact on his career as the leader of the Memphis Group and Sottsass Associati which he established in 1980.

To examine Sottsass’s involvement with the Italian Radicals, it is good to take a look at the Radical Design movement and its theories as a whole, and study the role of Sottsass in this canon. For Sottsass, the late 1960s marked a period which he would dedicate for reassessment and self-criticism (Thomé 2014, 189). Simultaneously, the era of the Radical Design – also known as both counter- and anti-design – began to rise, particularly in Italy. Sottsass found this time as a perfect opportunity to embark upon his intimate, artistic and professional insurgency (Radice 1993, 170). From 1964 onwards, several exhibitions, designs and partnerships with the Italian Radical collectives had concluded a fulfilled *tabula rasa* which helped Sottsass to form Memphis, by the accomplishment of formal and linguistic experimentation (Picchi 2014, 12). This chapter will explain and introduce the concept of Italian Radical Design, which Sottsass associated with and how this Radical period has affected the establishment of Memphis.

Approaching Radicalization

Like Renaissance was born in Florence in the 15th century, Radical Design was also provided with the same fertile and rich ground to be born into in the 20th century (Hucal 2016). The term Radical Design refers to a movement and a period in design which occurred roughly between the years 1966 and 1974 (Radice 1993, 171). The post-war, industrial, and economic expansions had risen the position of architectural practice on a podium as its importance in Italian society was increasing in the 1960s. Furthermore, the design had been a primary instrument of the financial and constitutional guidelines, which was addressed towards the fundamental, or even ferocious modernization of Italy (Burney 1991, 116). The new generation of Italian designers and architects

felt malcontent with the approach towards design which favored orientation to the consumption and industrialization (Hauffe 1998, 146). New and contemporary possibilities inspired this generation, notably when the affluence of Italy began to show its fractures in the 1960s until the 1970s. The outbreak of national terrorism, intellectual crisis and

economic depression marked the most burdensome times of the post-war Italian society (Adamson & Pavitt 2011, 23). These weaknesses of the state were contributed to radicalization that commenced these new-found architects to build on solutions, rather than following the ongoing structure (Strauss 2020, 16). The classy, 50’s Italian style and commercial-friendly design was not the significant points to any further extent, since the consumer society and its demands were no longer the goal in the design process of the new generation. The concept of “Made in Italy” was an utter antithesis to battle against and the hunger to carry out criticism towards Modernism was seeking powerful methods.



Fig. 27 Pratone (1971) designed by Gruppo Strum and produced by Gufram. One of the most well-known examples of counter-design movement. Made to look like a hard and sculptural, large-scale piece of grass, Pratone actually surprises the seater with its softness and playfulness (Hauffe 1998, 146).

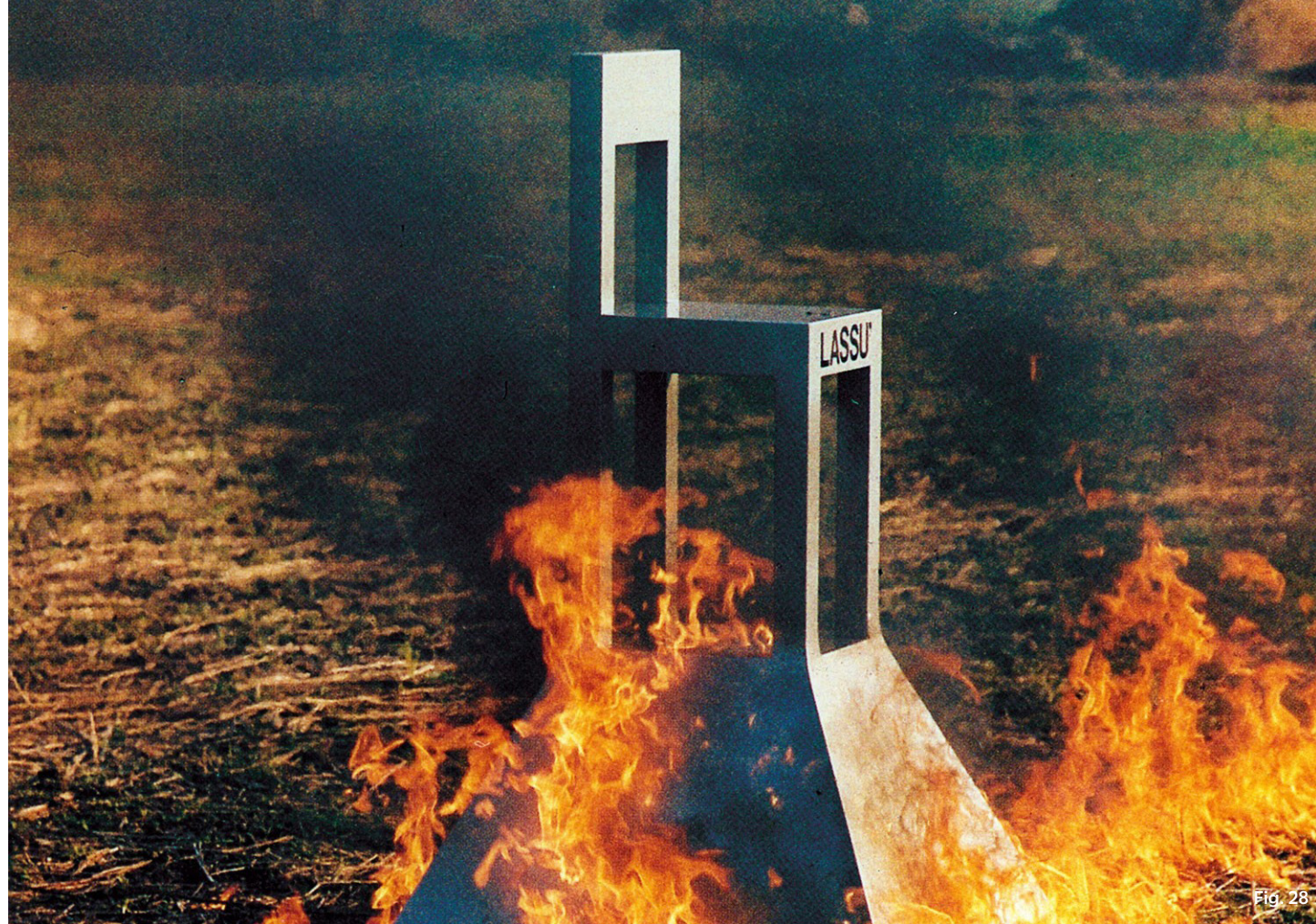


Fig. 28

Radical Design in Italy was evolving alongside to *Arte Povera*³ movement, which also acted as an inspiration for the Radicals, together with other blooming movements, including both pop and conceptual art. These endorsed the possibilities for radicalizing and ambition to spread the ideology of anti-design. The designers and architects espoused the provoking aesthetics and idiosyncratic materials to promote the limitations of capitalism and to support a less bourgeois world (Trevaini 2018). The Radical manifestos, artistic gatherings and performances provided opportunities to come across new ideas on how to overthrow the existing principles (Hucal 2016). According to Radice

³**Arte Povera**, literally 'poor art', was an Italian art movement that was introduced in 1967 by Germano Celant. The movement aimed to challenge and disorganize the values in the contemporary, money-making oriented gallery system by using throwaway materials and exploring unconventional ways of making art (Tate Modern n.d).



Fig. 29

The mutual, shared objectives and interests in challenging consumerism with the Pop artists was reaffirming for the Radicals. But it was not only these ingredients which mattered, as the political motives were borne upon as well. For example, Cristiano Toraldo di Francia (1941–2019), co-founding partner of Superstudio, explained that the discussions were focused on the relationships between architecture and humankind, but also introduced the politics while questioning the eligibility of Modernism (Hucal 2016). However, the Radicals did not really create physical architecture, even though it could have been expected from such fundamental-oriented collectives. Andrea Branzi (b. 1938), for example, did not recapitulate Radical movement as a distinctly defined "movement". Instead, he characterized it as a living, vibrant phenomenon or a field for experimenting (Thomé 2014, 189).



Sottsass and the Italian Radicals

Although the Radicals' experimentations had almost no limits, the way of creating Radical design or architecture did implement as collectives rather than individually. Moreover, the collectives and groups accentuated Regionalism, which guided the Radicals to settle their headquarters in the biggest cities of Italy. The main scenes were Florence, Turin, and Milan. Florence was non-industrialized birthplace of Radical Design and Milan was the publisher of the leading journals such as *Casabella*, *Domus* and *Modo*, and hotspot for *Triennale* and *Salone del Mobile*. Turin was considered an opposite of Florence, as an industrialized city of automaker Fiat, where young Sottsass had worked as well (Strauss 2020, 16). As there

were no limitations, the Radical groups enhanced their identities by calling themselves by witty names; Superstudio and Archizoom Associati were based in Florence, Studio Alchymia⁴ in Milan, and Gruppo Strum in Turin.

Sottsass himself had become interested in the radical design through the counterculture with the Beat poets, and hippie movements which he witnessed during his residency in the United States (Radice 1993, 170; Sudjic 2015, 153). As being inspired by his experiences in both India and the US, he wanted to confront himself and his talent as a designer by joining and challenging his expertise with the Italian Radicals.

⁴There are different ways to spell the name of the studio. In this thesis, I have adopted the spelling **Alchymia** from Radice (1985). Another common option is **Alchimia**.

Simultaneously, the radicals were inspired by Sottsass, who was pictured as an utmost designer and mentor. Also, Sottsass's far-reaching connections were taken into account, as the headquarters of Poltronova became *the place* for experimentation of Radical design. The "*Radical Factory*" – as Andrea Branzi had baptized it – was the space for the major talents were endorsed and thoughts about the demolition of the bourgeois habitat in pursuit of a new way of living, full of color and nonconformist thinking (Meloni in Carpenter 2017). However, according to Andrea Branzi, Sottsass was not a Radical, but by his interest towards Italian Radicals and his broad relations, Sottsass had introduced the Radical movement to magazines well (Branzi in Kazi 2006, 250). Even though his personal landmark, Memphis, would not begin until the 1980s, Sottsass's activity amongst the Radicals prefigured his work (Hucal 2016). In addition, members of the Radical groups did take part in Memphis as well soon after.

Fig 31 Casabella n.371/1972. Photo by Alessandro Mendini about Radical Design.

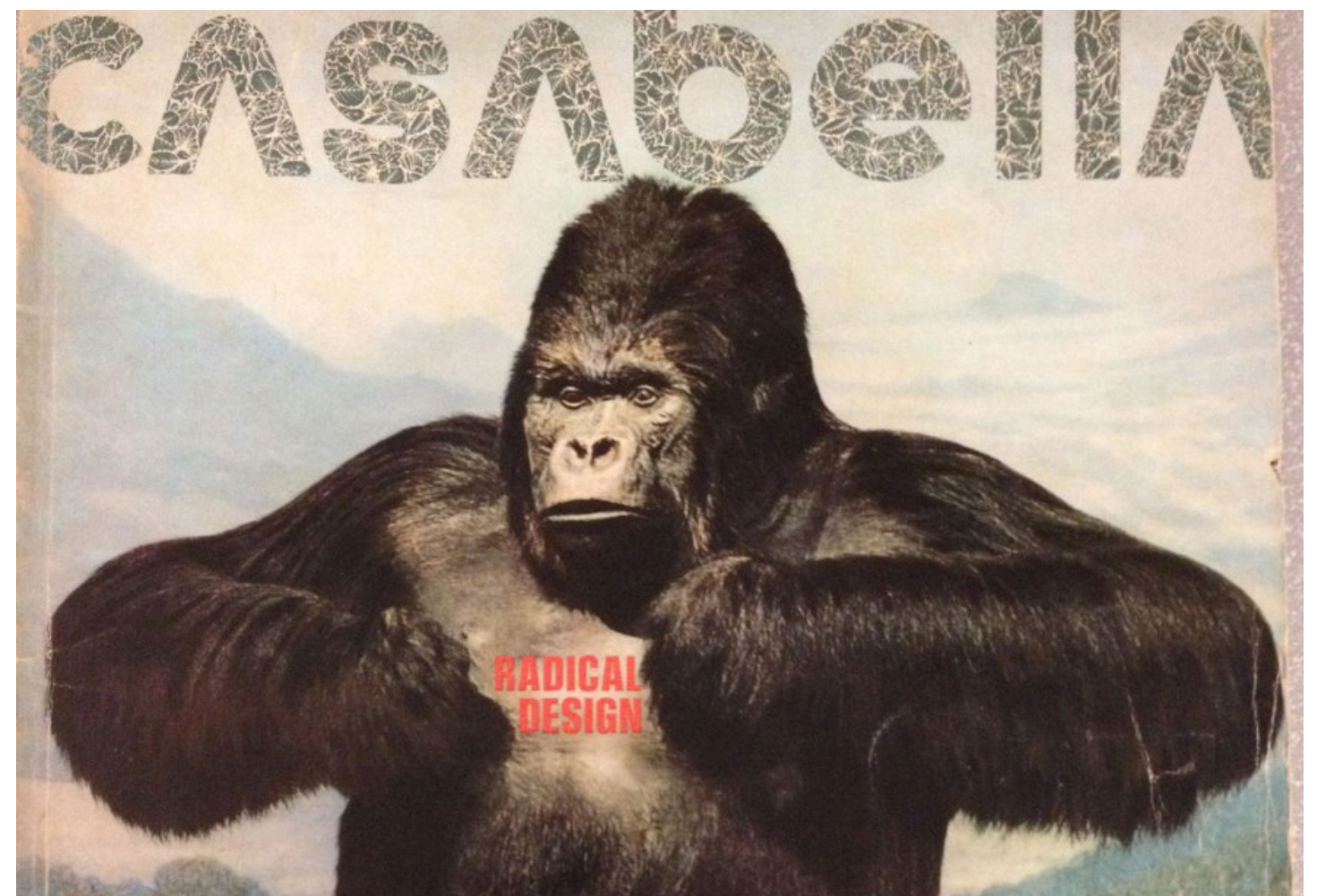


Fig. 31

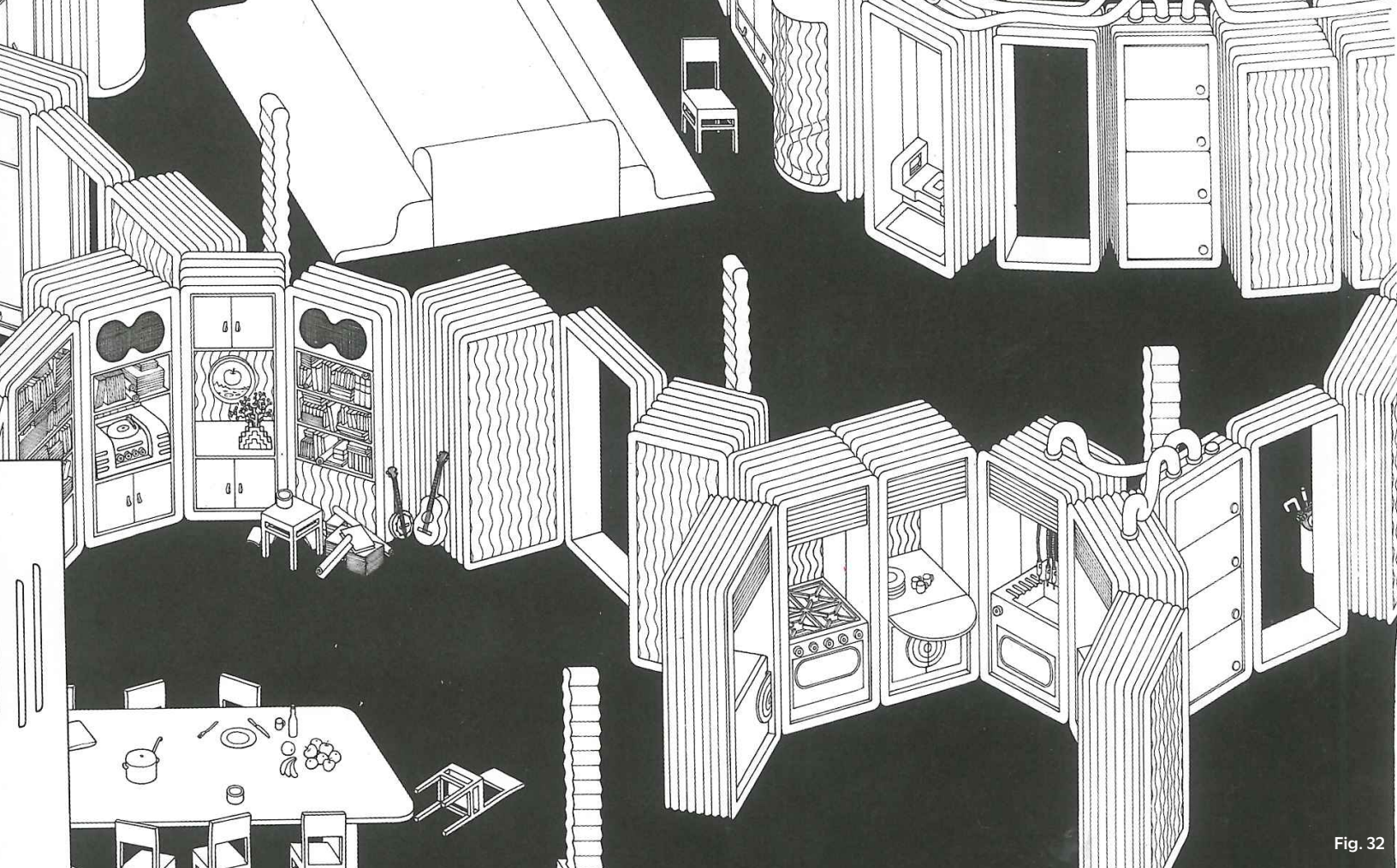


Fig. 32

Italy: The New Domestic Landscape

The landmark of Italian Radical design occurred in the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York in May of 1972, when the museum organized the exhibition *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, which augmented Italian Radical Design on a throne. The exhibition, curated by Emilio Ambasz and supported financially by leading manufacturers and Italian government, received an extensive and desired success, which revealed the significance of the Italian design for the rest of the world (Sudjic 2015, 163; Strauss 2020, 28).

The remarkable exhibition presented pieces, divided into two segments, "Objects" and "Environments" where the Radicals participated. In total 180 domestic objects and eleven environments commissioned for the exhibition. (Thomé 2014, 227; Strauss 2020, 28) Sottsass described in the brief of the exhibition, how the prototypes represented series of ideas instead of products. He wrote: "*I only wished to suggest such thoughts with no intention of entering into the realms of aesthetics, or, as it is called, design*" (Thomé 2014, 227)

Italy: The New Domestic Landscape performed an overall vision of the present circumstances of design, which positioned the Italian Radical Design on an international map of design. The influence of this exhibition is a juxtaposition to the Biennale of 1980, which boosted Post-Modernism to universal, architectural discussion. The Radical movement had influence on Ettore Sottsass, first through Studio Alchymia and, later on, the Memphis Group.



Fig. 33

Fig 33: Exhibition poster of Italy: The New Domestic Landscape.



Fig 33: Living unit designed by Ettore Sottsass for Italy: The New Domestic Landscape

2. Stuck Inside of Mobile

**with the
Memphis
Blues Again**

2.1 Playing the record again and again – Memphis begins



2.1 Playing the record again and again – Memphis begins

In the beginning of the 1980s, Sottsass began to think over about creating something new, in which his effect on design would represent his curiosity and personal character in a better and stronger manner. Sottsass had taken part of Studio Alchymia – established in 1976 by Alessandro Guerriero and led by Alessandro Mendini – but their mindsets did not weld together in the best manner. Mendini was often portrayed as a melancholic conceptualist of Italian Post-Modernism, and, on the contrary, Sottsass was the charismatic mentor or guru, with dazzling attitude towards design (Winston 2015). In addition, the viewpoints between Alchymia and Sottsass were contradistinctive, since Sottsass did not consider manufacturing as such an important part of design. Sottsass preferred to create objects, which had no urge to stand for capitalist system in a need of obsequious acceptance but could still be significant and powerful. Sottsass's anti-manufacturing ideology is one of the key elements of his design, which is demonstrating his passion to create design which may judge and comment.

Alchymia versus Memphis

Sottsass's thoughts varied from Studio Alchymia, which appeared as a "workshop" of design, intending to have their objects in production (Burney 1991, 136). Sottsass had expressed his unwillingness to design consumerist objects. Sottsass reflects the beginning of his career at Olivetti, where he decided to give up on the career of an industrial designer. *"I didn't want to do any more consumerism products, because it was clear that the consumerist attitude was quite dangerous in some ways"* (Sottsass in McGuirk, 2007). Nevertheless, Sottsass stayed as a member of Alchymia for only one year and already in May 1980, his own influence and interest on the design began to take place and Sottsass Associates was established (Burney 1991, 145;

Sudjic 2015, 171). Sottsass Associates – which was inaugurated together with Matteo Thun, Aldo Cibic, Marco Marabelli and Marco Zanini – was an opportunity for Sottsass to share his expertise and experience of his occupation with young, thirty-something partners, who he described being full of energy and honesty (Thomé 2014, 275). A few months later, the Memphis Group was born and began to spread out its label. The year 1980 resembles the most significant and remarkable year in Sottsass's practice.

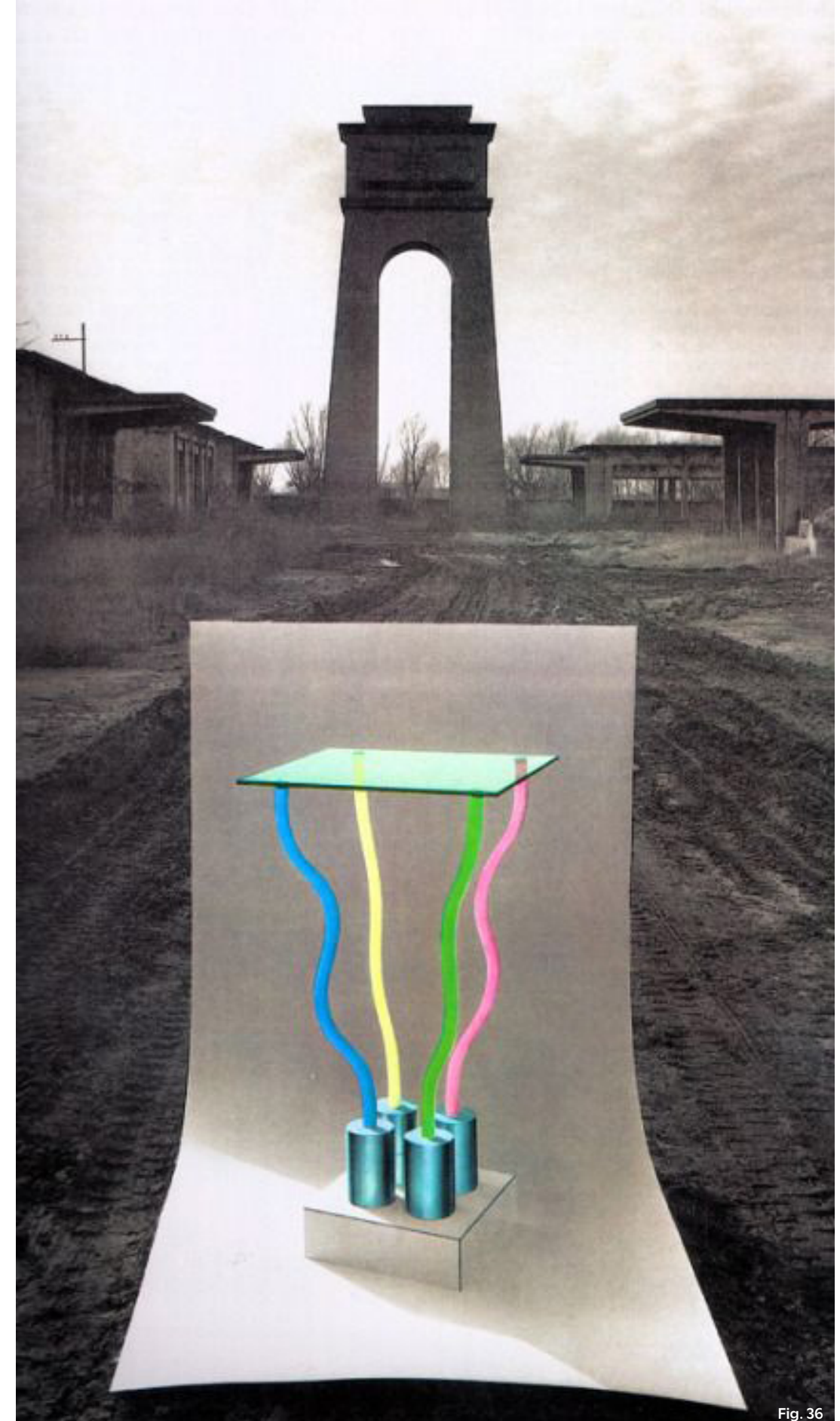


Fig. 36

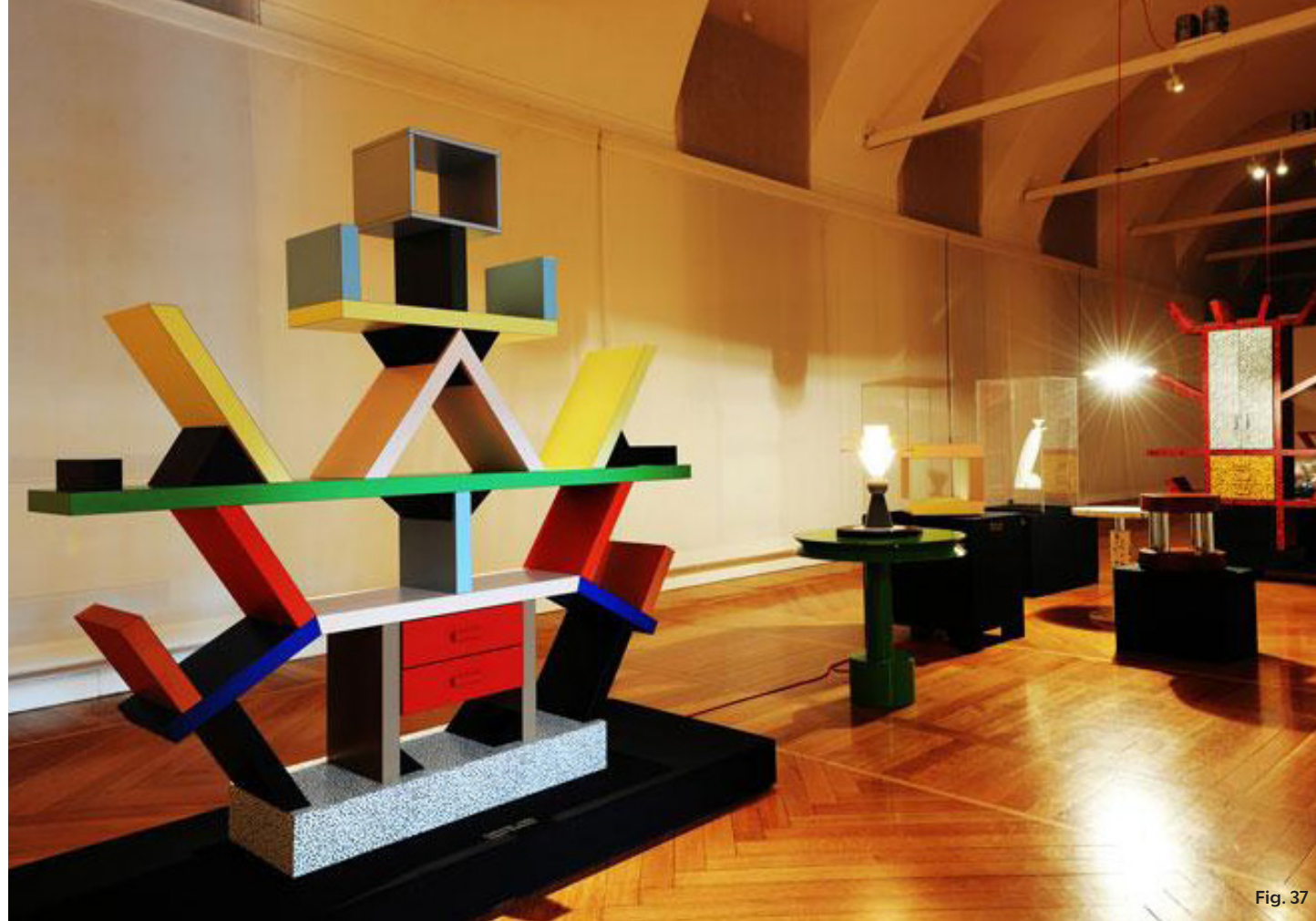


Fig. 37

The New Design

Previously, between the years 1977 and -78, Sottsass had worked together with Andrea Branzi, who also attended Studio Alchymia, creating so-called pre-Memphis furniture and lamps for the Italian furniture store chains, such as Croff Casa. However, these objects did not receive success and turned out as a failure – the retailers and salesmen even advised their customers not to buy them. (Radice 1985, 23) Branzi had been in a vital role to transit Sottsass from the rebellious, Radical Design period to the unpredicted success that Memphis was about to represent in the Post-Modern era through their long friend- and partnership since the 1960s (Picchi 2014, 12). Nevertheless, it was not yet until December of 1980, when Sottsass had gathered around a

group of designers, who would set up the design collective, Memphis, and began the launch of a spacecraft of Post-Modern design. He brought Michele De Lucchi accompanied by Aldo Cibic, Marco Zanini, Nathalie Du Pasquier, Matteo Thun, George Sowden and Martine Bedin and they began sharing ideas, objectives and symbolic representation of their future design (Sudjic 2015, 171; Burney 1991, 145). Even though the upcoming Memphis design was known for its physical features assimilated with colors, shapes and materials, this meeting was not yet focusing on the material or concrete side of Memphis. The more prominent role for these young, Milanese designers and architects – most of them on their early thirties, while Sottsass was already 63 – was



Fig. 38



Fig. 39

to find a compelling solution for recreating an approach to design and to plan different spaces, to foretell atmospheres and envision further lives (Radice 1985, 23). Their primary questions addressed the future of interiors; wondering, if it was essential and required to drown into taupe colored leather sofas, drink coffee around chrome- and glass-made coffee tables and cover all the floors with colorless carpets (Radice 1985, 23). Even though the attitude of the young designer may give an impression of a subversive attitude, the Memphis Group did not see itself as part of Radical Design but called themselves as "The New Design" instead, the term initially introduced and launched by Alchymia (Radice 1985, 24; Sisson 2017).



Fig. 40

One scratched record

However, where did the name *Memphis* come from? What does a name of an American city have to do with Milanese designers? According to Sottsass's partner, Barbara Radice (1985, 25), the first note of the name appeared first time in a sketchbook of Michele De Lucchi, where he has quickly written the word Memphis close by the date mark 11th of December 1980. This date located to an evening when the designers named above gathered together with Sottsass. Meanwhile, brainstorming ideas about new and groundbreaking possibilities, Bob Dylan's song *Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again* (1966) was repeatedly playing in the background. Sottsass explained the precise moment of baptizing the new collective in an interview by journalist Horacio Silva of *The New York Times*

with a witty twist. Sottsass recalls himself being very drunk at the time; *"My brain is filled with holes,"* he claimed, but firmly guaranteed that the name Memphis came from the Bob Dylan song indeed. Ironically and frankly speaking, Sottsass continues: *"The record was scratched, and everybody was so drunk that nobody could change it, and the word "Memphis" kept repeating until, finally, someone suggested we call ourselves that. That's how it happened"* (Sottsass in Silva, 2002).



Fig. 41

However, even as a name of an American city of Memphis, known for Graceland of Elvis Presley, Memphis was simultaneously epitomizing an ancient city of culture in Egypt. This duet combines effortlessly these elements – Pop and ancient high culture – as the name of Post-Modern collective that revivals Classicism bringing new column into the network of Post-Modern design and architecture (Collins, 1987, 122).

2.2 Design manifesto of the young, drunk designers



2.2 Design manifesto of the young, drunk designers

Memphis appeared signifying an open-minded society of designers which dedicated their design for life, not taking manufacturers, money, or critique into account. In spite of the very open nature of the Memphis design “programme”, there was a clear message stated by all the works in their later exhibitions, though not one that could be explained in terms of a style label (Burney 1991, 148). Especially, in the pluralistic and disorganized decade of the 1980s, where history meets the culture, Memphis may be designated as *a fruit salad* (Collins & Papadakis 1989, 35). This reflects the aim of Memphis and its aspiration to disobey and challenge the norms of “*sense of good taste*” in design. To sum this up – good taste was the bad thing Memphis fought against (Slesin 1989) The designers of Memphis, including Michele De Lucchi, Hans Hollein and Arata Isozaki described that the aim was to provide furniture which bring emblematic, poignant and ritual aspects, which are the fundamental doctrines of nonsensical and monumental objects (Domus n.d). Even though the cerebation of Memphis might seem radical with their honest, head-on approach towards common, good taste, Sottsass describes themselves as non-revolutionary designers “*very calm people, drunk every evening, but calm nevertheless*” (Sottsass in Silva, 2002).

Ingredients of the Memphis fruit salad

Memphis was founded from three groups of designers, which all had their position and significance in Sottsass’s establishment. The first, considered as “the inner core”, involved colleagues of Sottsass. The second one was called “an international group” including famous designers, such as Hans Hollein, Shiro Kuramata and Michael Graves, who continued their own way of design, but added the Memphis brand and strengthened the status of the collective with their occasional pieces. The last and the third group involved “try-outs”, new, young designers such as Peter Shire (b. 1947), probably known the best for his Bel Air chair (1982) (Sudjic 2015, 179). The three parties of designers together created the mosaic of different cultures, backgrounds and

ideas, which made the design of Memphis identifiable and distinctive – and later on phenomenal. This hodgepodge does not only include the variety of designers, but also the numerous media they use in their work. Memphis can be seen as a blend of visual arts combined with architecture, sculpture and ceramics, glass, metalwork and furniture, offering the possibility to experience it in a new way (Collins & Papadakis 1989, 36).



Fig. 43



Fig. 44

Ideology – Does it even exist?

However, the major or official manifesto of Memphis was never genuinely addressed or invented. A precise idea for Memphis, as a sense of a manifestation or declaration, does not exist. Barbara Radice (1985, 141) describes Memphis as an anti-ideological because it is searching for opportunities instead of solutions. She clarifies that for Memphis, it has never been an important factor to explain precisely what their design is really based on. Memphis did not have any particular, stylistic guidelines for the furniture design. Also, instead of concentrating on the intellectual or ideological satisfaction, Sottsass's priority was to aim for sensual liberation (Burney 1991, 145; 155).



Fig. 45

Sottsass supplements this by stating, that Memphis is not dedicated for eternity, but for life instead (Koenig & Clinton 2017). By these words, he may refer to the rapid uprising and brief existence of Memphis, which did not aim to please or comfort anyone specifically. According to Beauchesne (2017), Sottsass has believed that design is meant to reflect the fact that humans are experiencing the world first through their senses, and thereafter intellectualizing takes precedence. This could resemble the ability to *carpe diem* – live in the moment, where the abundant beauty, colors, shapes, and materials are the focal points of concentration when it comes to experiencing Memphis.

Despite the fact that the aforementioned words may sound like an unambiguous ideology, Radice (1985, 141) tells that the philosophy of Memphis is intentionally using blurred and flexible outlines – which are creating kind of a “super ideology” which is better to call an attitude. Therefore, the ideology of Memphis as a whole may well be acknowledged as mindset of the designers who were willing to pop up from the norms. Memphis was a euphoric philosophy for design as an emotive illustration (Sudjic 2014, 413).

2.3 Exhibiting Memphis



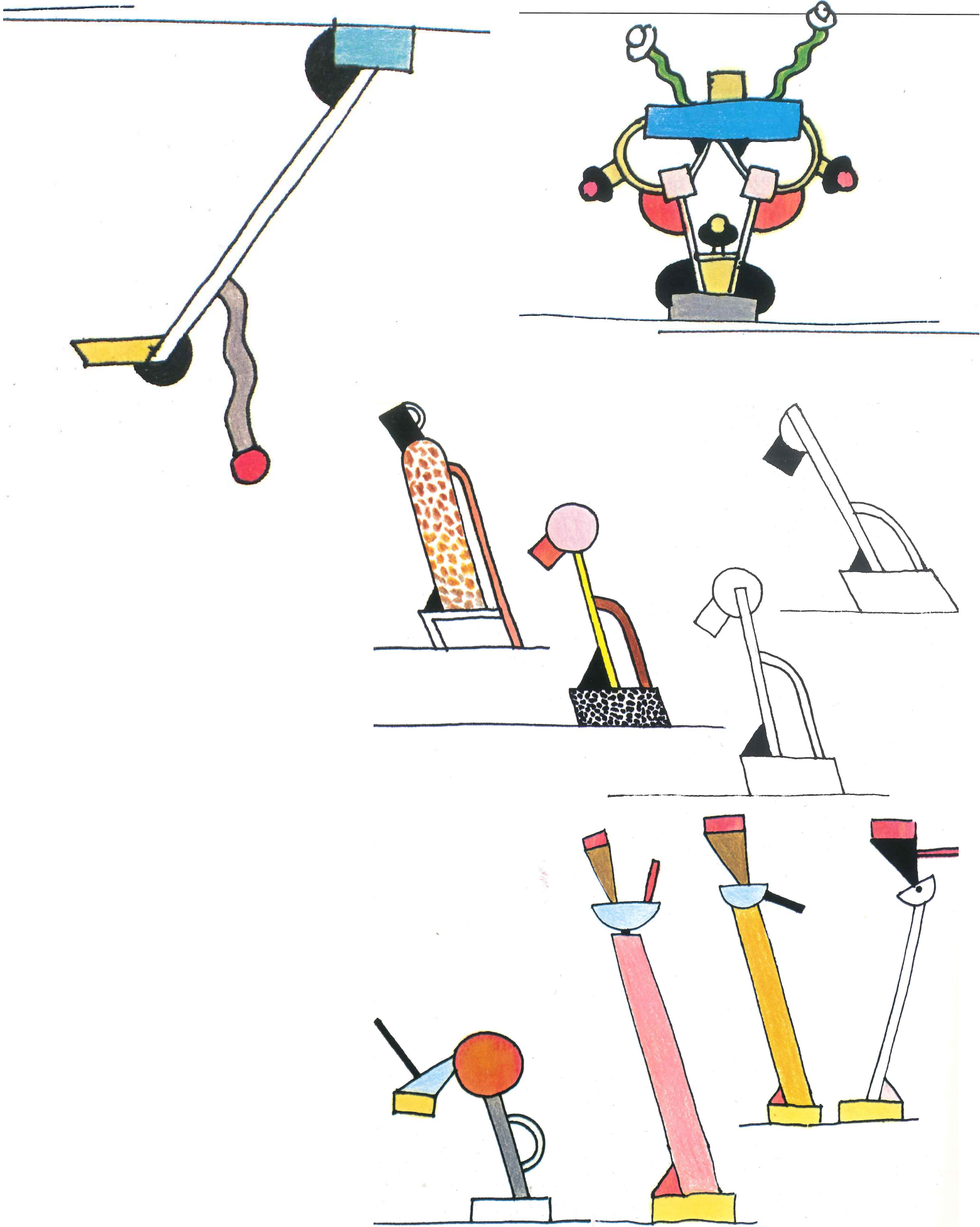
2.3 Exhibiting Memphis

Since the beginning of Memphis, the group had begun to transform their drunk-made sketches into reality. The first ones were ready on Monday the 9th of February, and more than a hundred drawings were produced in total (Radice 1985, 26). Nonetheless, not a single word was spoken about the upcoming exhibition, but the feeling of anticipation was continuously increasing (Sudjic 2015, 174). The whimsical invitation – with *Tyrannosaurus Rex* illustrated on the front by Luciano Paccagnella – welcomed the guests to a colorful, tentative assortment of furniture and the Memphis – *The New International Style* – which began to arise among the discussions about design.

A Shotgun wedding between Bauhaus and Fisher-Price

Memphis presented its debut collection on September 18th in 1981, when their first exhibition was held at the Arc '74 Showroom in Milan (Radice 1985, 26). The tangible outcomes: prototypes – some of them with names given after luxury hotels and exotic destinations, such as *Plaza*, *Casablanca*, *Carlton*, *Treetops* and *Tahiti* – were shown in the gallery. A total of fifty-seven objects was exhibited, including four tables, chairs, eleven lamps, glass objects, bookcases inter alia (Sudjic 2015, 174). With a little naïve, witty shapes the furniture was covered in rainbow colors, and had a look of a tutti-frutti candy. Memphis pieces appeared not only as a funny but moral-breaking and shocking new furniture, which were later portrayed as “A *shotgun wedding between Bauhaus and Fisher-Price*” in the San

Francisco Chronicle (Pellegrin, 2015). The first Memphis exhibition became a success. Thousands of people, approximately 2500 individuals, including various journalists all over the world came to see the unconventional furniture, trying to comprehend what Memphis really was all about (Burney 1991, 148). Since their showroom was overflowing with spectators and the members of Memphis, such as Glenn Adamson and Barbara Radice, recalls that they could hardly even see the exhibition themselves, since they did not have any chance to get into the gallery. Radice had thought an accident must have happened and on the contrary, Sottsass was afraid of a conceivable terrorist bomb downtown Milan and therefore did not want to attend in the first place (Pagliacolo 2015; Howarth 2015a).



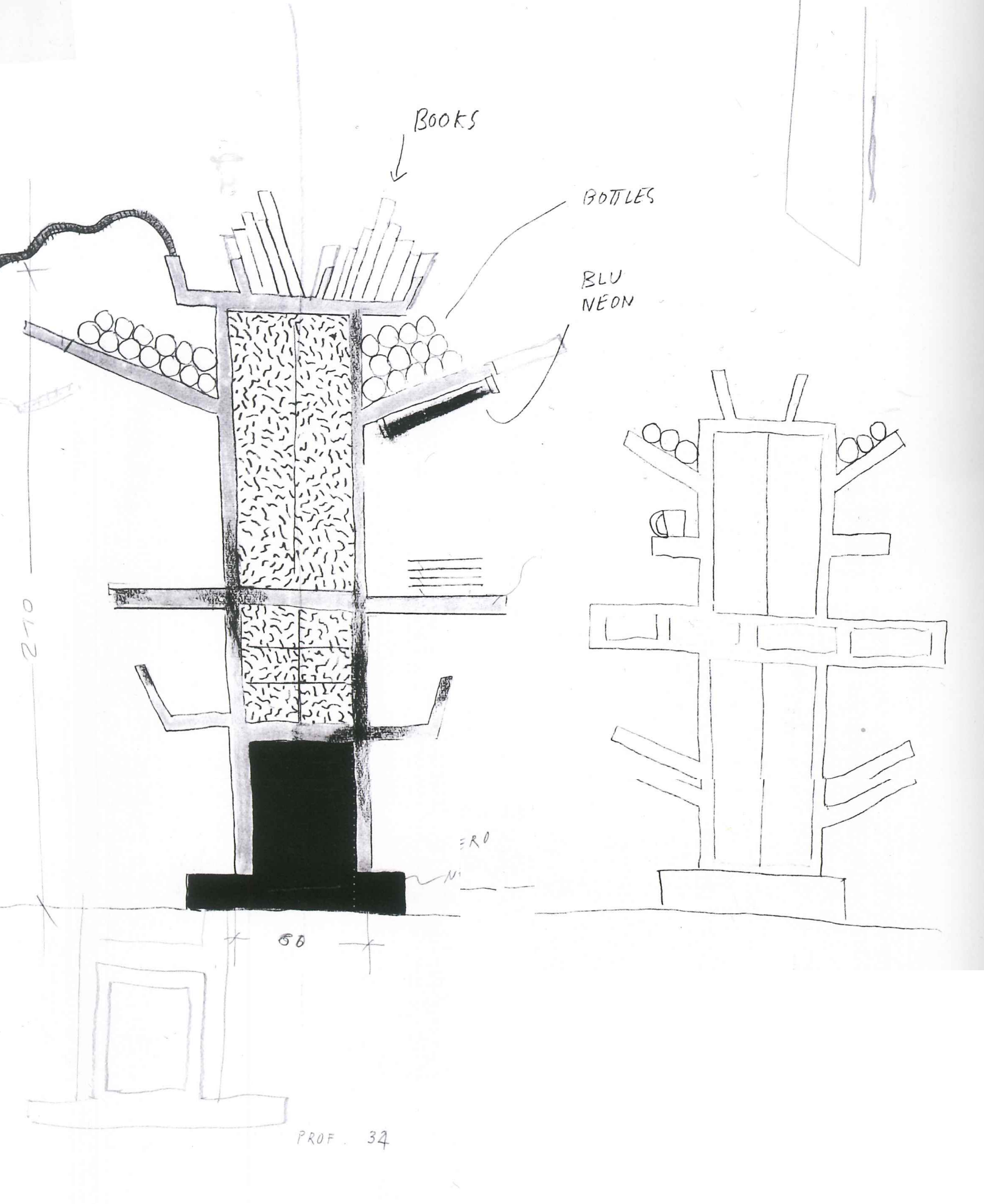


Fig. 49

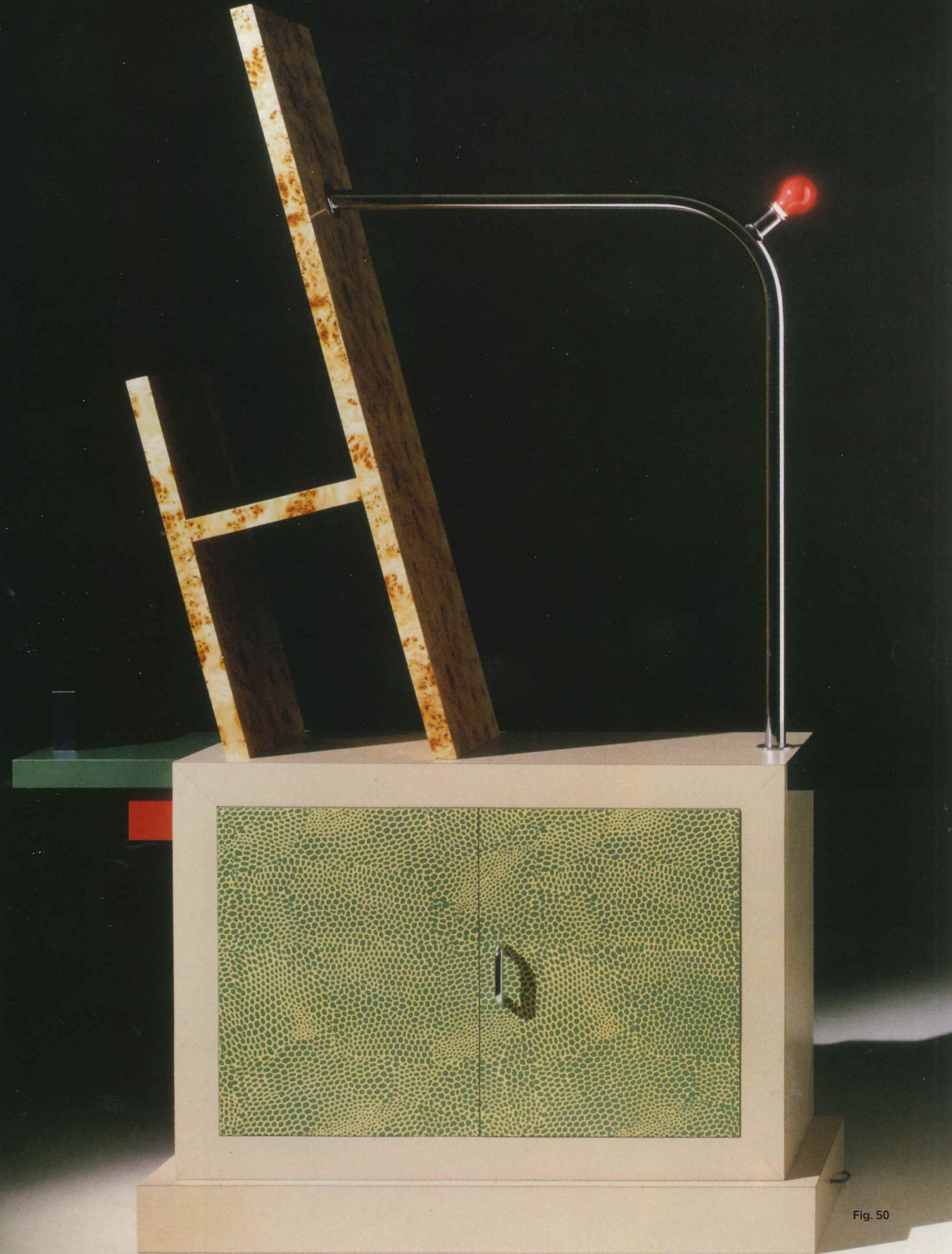


Fig. 50



Fig. 51

Memphis's philosophy did address furniture to the same kind of principle as obtains in the fashion industry, where collection change from year to year (Bangert & Armer & Sottsass 1990, 24). It was a style mixing high and low materials – from marble to laminate, telling not to be part of Post-Modern design, and appeared both as kitsch and higher cultural objects. What made this furniture astonishing, was the possibility for each designer to bring their own culturally specific influence on this mixture of design furniture (Beauchesne 2017). Although, Memphis furniture might have visually represented unergonomic zigzags, it was meant to be functional and they really wanted them to be considered as furniture – not just some sculptural objects or art pieces. This can be explained as Sottsass's aim to use

handcrafts as little as possible and focus on industrial, mass-production techniques instead. Sottsass described, at the opening of the exhibition, that the Memphis furniture is a big promise for the Italian furniture design, and also a key to the language of the forthcoming (Slesin 1981). However, the furniture did not receive such interest on manufacturing and industrializing the furniture, to take every advantage of mass production. Memphis might have used these methods for provoking and enhancing the idea of Post-Modernism. Charles Jencks described that Memphis is exactly what the biggest Modernists, such as Bauhaus-based Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer fought against. And these architects Memphis was definitely parodied. (Sassi 1985, 206).

2.4 Love for Laminate



Fig. 52

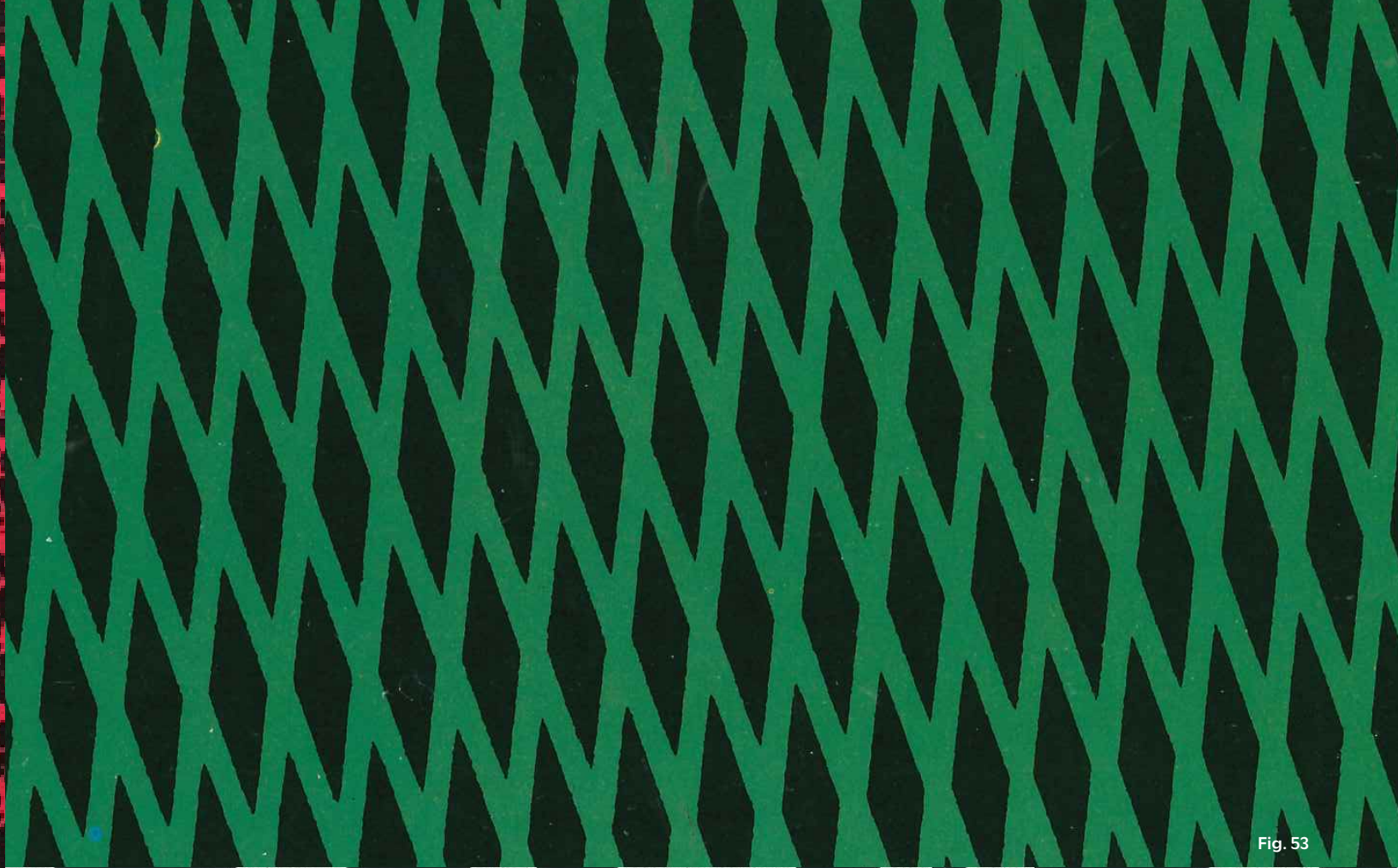


Fig. 53

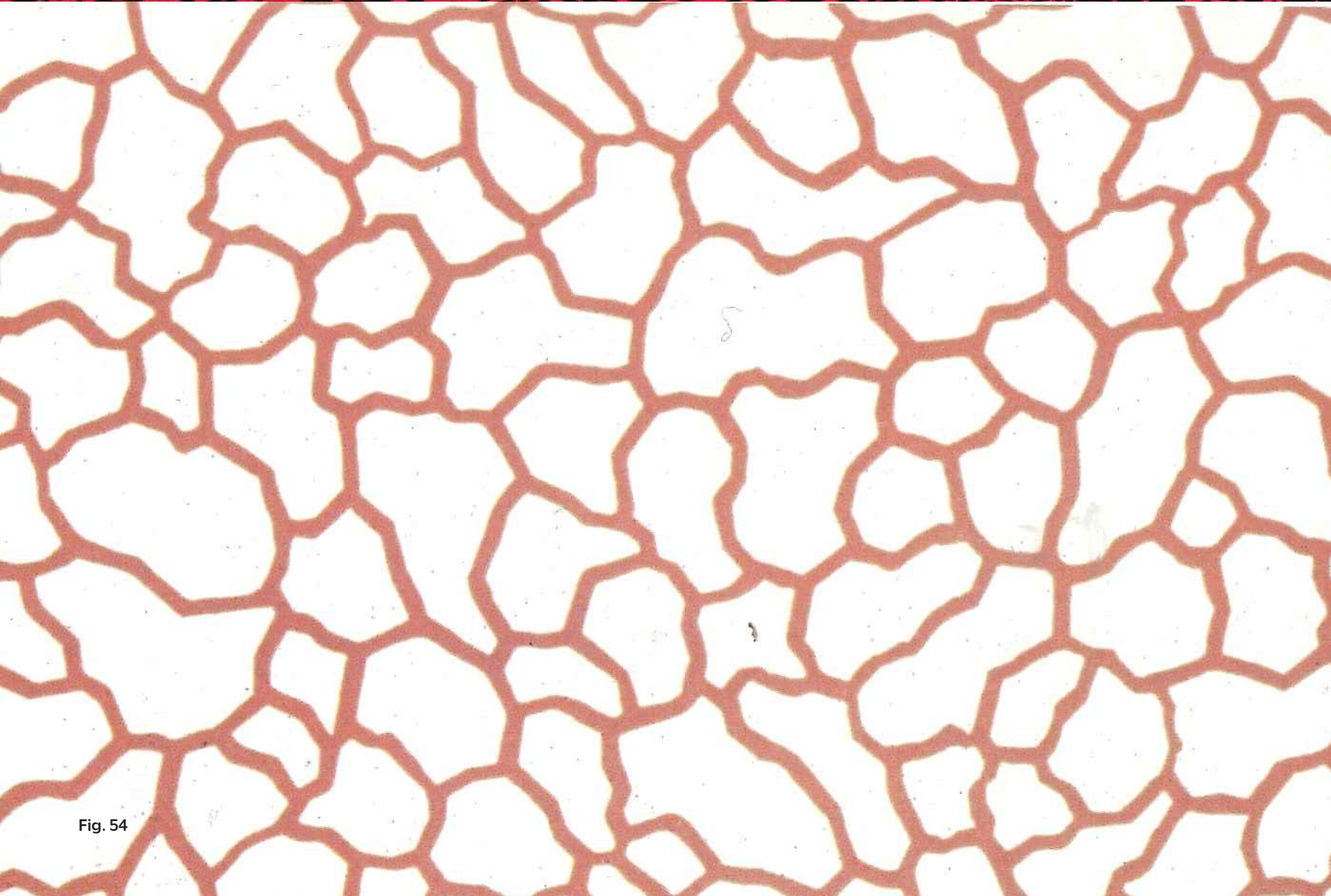


Fig. 54



Fig. 55

2.4 Love for Laminate

Memphis has idiosyncratic style within its design. Already the first collection of Memphis in '81 presented not only the unique shapes and peculiar looks, but also the material palette they were using. Probably the most known material which Memphis used was plastic laminate, which became the symbol of their furniture. Different manufacturers were interested in giving their samples for use, and the biggest collaboration of Memphis was made with Abet Laminati. Sottsass had been associated with the manufacturer before while he worked at Poltronova with the Superboxes. These plastic laminates gave Memphis its characteristic look and changed the visual style of contemporary furniture design.

Memphis physics

The plastic laminates had existed for years, and they had become popular public but domestic spaces as well. The wide chart of available bright colors and patterns – such as bricks and fake wood – together with the easy and practical features, the plastic laminate had become a part of urban, mass cultural scene (Radice 1985, 35). The low-cost and easily functioning material was often hidden or placed in spaces where it would not be noticed, such as kitchen counters, closets and bathrooms. Plastic laminates were often correlated to lack of good taste, deprivation and kitsch (Radice 1985, 35). Memphis, on the other hand, decided to change the course and use plastic laminate as a material which may apply to everywhere. They did not want to consider its reputation as an inexpensive

matter, but instead bring it up as an appealing impression. Sottsass highlighted the new status of plastic laminate followingly: *“I wanted to take away the defense given by the conventional scale of values to a certain political group. A rich woman covered in gold, for example, can say that she has the best, because gold is the best. Instead, Memphis was saying that you are the best if you have plastic laminate”* (Sottsass in Burney 1991, 149).

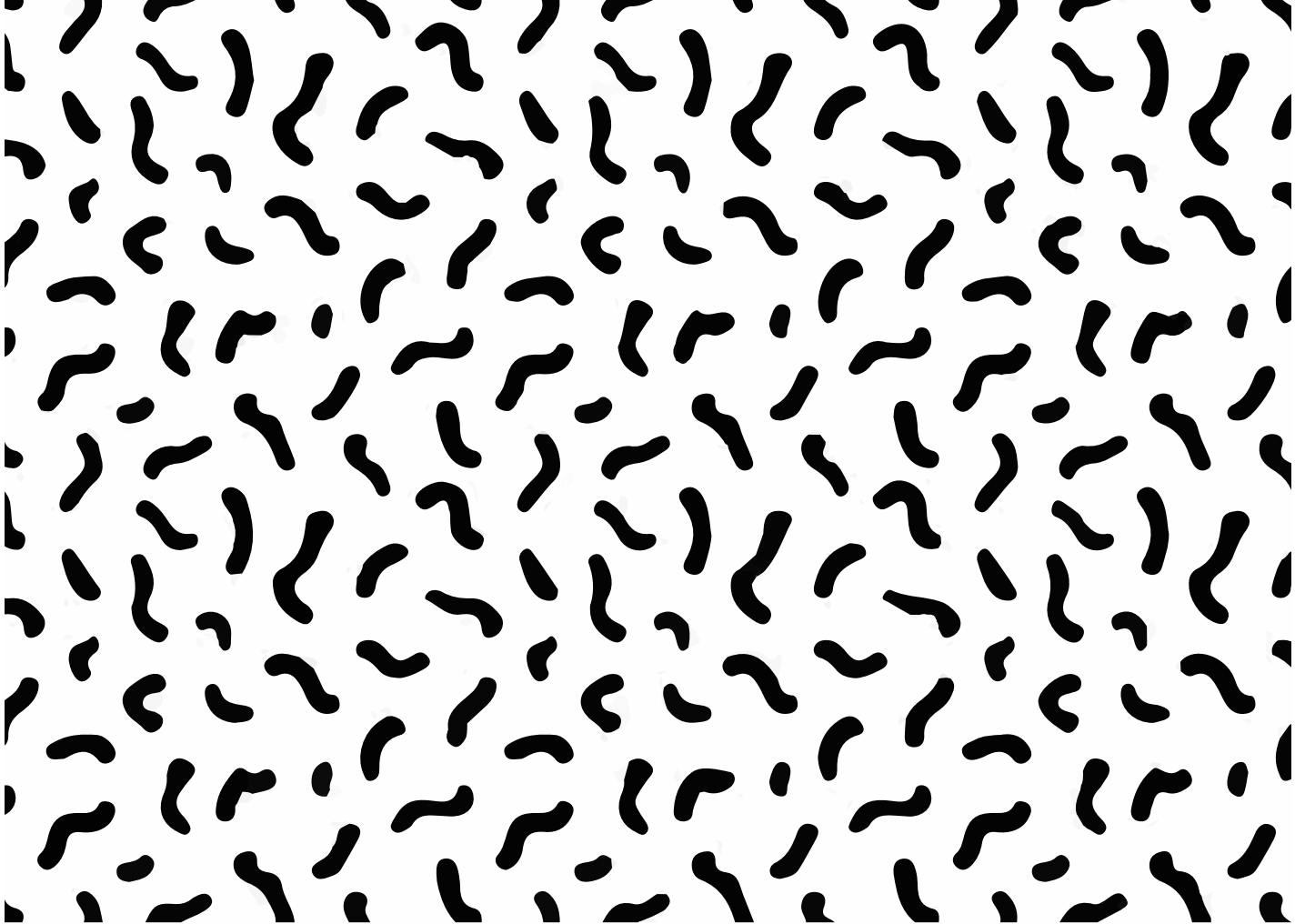


Fig 56: Bacterio print, the most successful pattern of Sottsass was designed in 1978. Sottsass explained the name Bacterio was chosen to picture the function, to metamorphically infect any object that is covered with it; confusing and concealing its true structure (Thomé 2014, 285).

The plastic laminates which Memphis was working with were often decorated with patterns, which the members of the collective had designed. The most known ornaments were drawn by Ettore Sottsass but designers, such as Michele De Lucchi, George Sowden, and Nathalie du Pasquier also assisted with laminate patterns. From these laminates, Bacterio pattern has become the most successful pattern of Sottsass was designed in 1978. Sottsass explained the name Bacterio was chosen to picture the function, to metamorphically infect any object that is covered with it; confusing and concealing its true structure (Thomé 2014, 285).

According to Sottsass, the plastic laminate shows an optimistic approach of the current design revolution, and the possibility to rebuild by using industrial materials as much as possible, while minimizing the handcrafts. However, he denies the quotations from the past styles and design – and therefore does not see their new design revolution as Post-Modern (Sottsass in Slesin, 1981). Memphis's philosophy did address furniture to the same kind of principle as obtains in the fashion industry, where collection change from year to year (Bangert & Armer & Sottsass 1990, 24). It was a style mixing high and low materials – from marble to laminate, telling not to be part of Post-Modern design, and appeared both as kitsch and higher cultural objects.



2.5 Memphis Mania

2.5 Memphis Mania

After Memphis was launched in Milan in 1981, the discussion on Post-Modern design and Memphis began to spread. As a whole, the Memphis can be seen as a significant, cultural phenomenon from the 1980s, which altered the commercial sense of world of design. Memphis reversed the existing prejudices which were around the idea of living. Memphis design reached attention and challenged the Modernist ideal and ideology by its boldness and new wave. Memphis may be seen as the mythical emblem of the “New Design” and the influence of Memphis is shown in the present day.

Speaking of Memphis

For Sottsass, Memphis was an abrupt beginning to his career, which made him an extraordinary visible figure, establishing his significance for the contemporary generation (Sudjic 2015, 179). Memphis challenged the orthodox ideology and aesthetics of design. Even though Sottsass was the leading designer and played the starring role, Memphis was a collaboration of designers, who were not forgotten (Adamson & Pavitt 2011, 47). The curious crowds in the first Memphis exhibition wanted to know that this peculiar movement all about. Also, the definition of Memphis did not come up effortlessly, since it was not an easy subject to define as a whole (Burney 1991, 148). However, the phenomenon which Memphis commenced was a phenomenon which evolved from

cultural and political necessities (Bell 2017). Sottsass described their design approach as an ethical attitude, which aimed for happier lives, better society. Nevertheless, Memphis opened new windows and sights for the future; Sottsass questioned the needs of symmetry and conformability of furniture and use of materials in their ulterior environments (Silva 2002). According to Sudjic (2015, 177), Memphis was a phenomenon with a provocative mix of both high and low culture. Sottsass had claimed that “Memphis is everywhere” and alleged that the design of Memphis was “quoting from suburbia” (Bayley 2008). This can be a reason why Memphis influenced people with different circumstances and backgrounds.

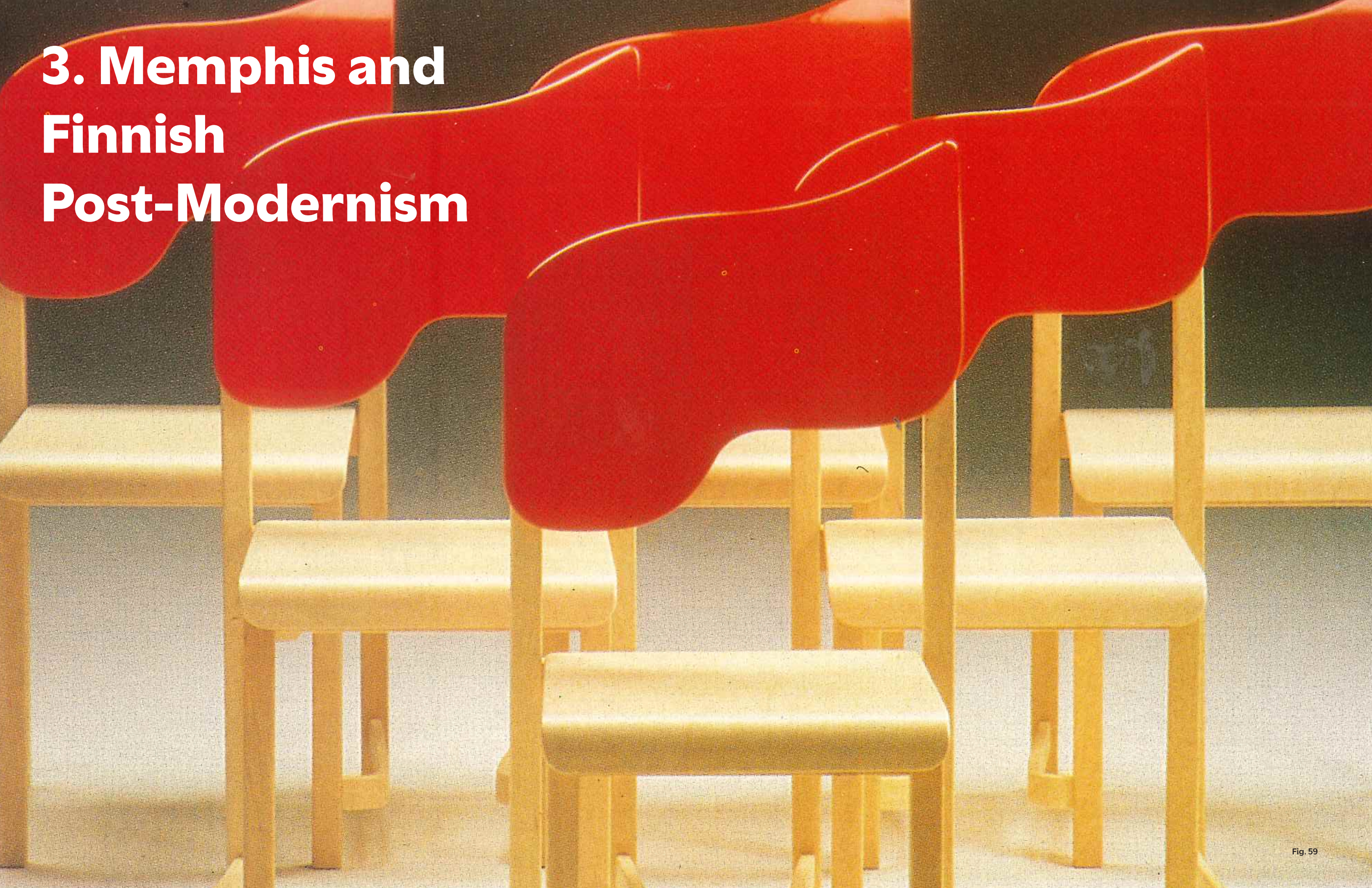
Memphis Hype

The interest and hype towards Memphis began to increase since their exhibitions. According to Radice (1993, 216), the success which Memphis received from the public and press was totally unforeseen. She recalls, that in six months, Memphis had been published in over hundred magazines and newspapers around the world. Later on, the fame and hype around Memphis grew among celebrities – such as the creative director of Chanel, Karl Lagerfeld, dedicated his entire residence in Monaco for Memphis’s first collection (Schwartzberg 2017). David Bowie decorated his apartment with Memphis furniture as well, and they were later sold at Sotheby’s auction after his death in 2016. Anna Wintour, the editor-in-chief of Vogue, has expressed ordinary furniture as “*useful, often beautiful, and sometimes quite valuable*”. However, she tells that it was not until 1981 and Memphis, when she called their new design as the collection of household objects which are merged as a cheerful synthesis of pop-rock music and historical references (Wintour 1982, 83). The whole Memphis collection left a big question mark behind with their new, witty furniture which looked like big totems or sculptures. The whole question mark was turning concrete, when Richard Horn had described that “*sitting on a Memphis chair is like sitting on a question mark*” (Beauchesne 2017).



Fig 58: Karl Lagerfeld in his apartment in Monte Carlo. The interiors were covered up in Memphis furniture.

3. Memphis and Finnish Post-Modernism



3.1 Post-Modernism in Finland

Post-Modernism had been blooming together with its juxtaposing theories and point-of-views in the architectural discourse since the 1960s. Slowly, the movement began to approach Finland as well. Traditionally, Finnish design had been characteristically Modernist and mostly influenced by the aesthetics of the Scandinavian design. The use of natural materials, such as wood, had been a standard part of the design. Notably, the 1930s Functionalism – together with Alvar Aalto's architecture and design – represented the elegance of Finnish design as a whole and gave a clear doctrine for Finnish design and architecture.

Both Modernism, and more specifically, Functionalism had altered Finnish architecture and design. The rapid growth and urban expansion of the once rural society collided when the new movements of arts and architecture reached Finland (Connah 2005). According to interior architect Rita Taskinen (b. 1949) (1989, 9–10), every designer knew that until the 1970s the professional discussion was only about the functional purpose and ergonomics. She adds that as a result of industrialization, professionals of aesthetics – including architects and designers – neglected the artistic approach towards design in their

work. “*Form follows function*” was seen as the prevailing attitude, which determined design as secondary attribute. However, the asceticism and the Functionalist ideal of “*beauty for everyday life*” started to fracture, when the explorations on architecture and design began to reach out from the comfort zone (Sassi 1985, 10–11).

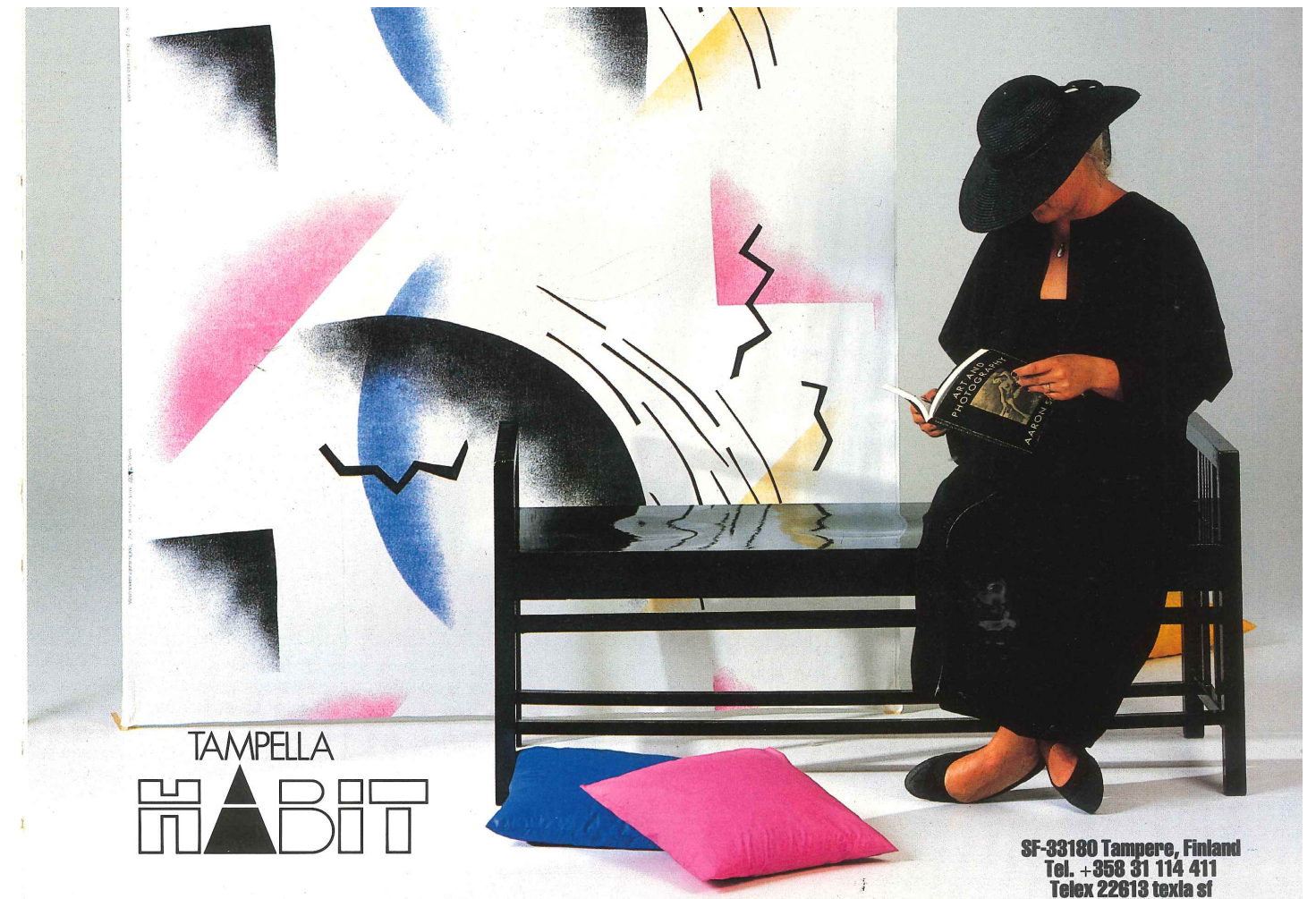




Fig. 61

The arrival of Post-Modernism and adaptation to the Finnish architectural discussion

Anita Seppä, a professor of the University of the Arts Helsinki, says that Post-Modernism arrived at Finland with the western culture and began to appear mostly in art and architecture (Seppä in Unkuri 2017). Architect Jyrki Tasa (2020) describes that Post-Modernism was a little nonessential term, since the word had a shade indicating a North American phenomenon. Yet, the overall thoughts were that the direction of architecture was on a transition. Connah (2005) suggests that in such a country like Finland, changes in architectural ideology were seen as an infringement from the United States. Giving up Modernism and letting the American eccentric new wave to snatch the Finnish architectural discourse would have almost meant giving up on Finnishness.

The theory of Post-Modernism was not such an eager topic in the Finnish architectural discussion. Briefly, Post-Modernism was seen as a protest against monotonous and dull Modernism (Tasa 2020). It was seen as a more attractive and vibrant style, which was found more interesting and fun among people, when comparing to Modernism. The increasing economic status of Finland in the turn of the 1980s assisted the further and broader spread of the Post-Modern style, which implemented the growing interest in this new design also among developers. Finland arrived at an economic upswing in the 1980s, which lasted for the whole decade. At the beginning of the period, the economic growth gave auspicious and favorable possibilities for even

smaller cities and municipalities to focus on architecture, allowing them to profile and build with a more personal approach. This boosted the construction of kindergartens, parish and community centres to increase (Vartola 2014, 174). This desire for personalization also affected interior architecture as also the interiors began to gain significance in the design process. Hence, the designers received more authority in order to maximize the identity of the space.

In search of new shapes

Post-Modernism was initially expected to last for a while and eventually fade away as a chic trend and contemporary perspective. Against the odds, the year 1980 asserted that Post-Modernism was not only a kooky, brief moment devoted to bumble around. Vice versa, it seemed that Post-Modernism was going to stay a little longer (Sassi 1985, 64). As Post-Modernism was breaking the rules of Finnish architecture, the design followed parallel. Nevertheless, this did not stand for the presumption that spatial design should give in to architecture and accept the “submissive” role in design (Taskinen 1989, 9). Post-Modernism progressed in furniture and spatial design simultaneously: accordingly, style and ideology could effortlessly break the old and familiar

Modernist ideal. Tasa (2020) recalls that Post-Modernism was distinctive and recognizable – especially on the level of details such as interiors and furniture. However, traces of Modernism were still present in the design process where the aim was to create an entity, which would have certain integrity in the design narrative. This idea differs from the thoughts Taskinen had as an interior architect about the role of a designer. Tasa (2020) adds that the Modernist aim for balance and certain unity made most of the architects design the spaces and furniture themselves along with their architectural practice.

The idea of Functionalism as the most genuine philosophy to put into practice began to fail out from the lead slowly. However, this did not mean the total destruction of Finnish Modernism. Instead, the younger generation of designers was still attached to Functionalism, but with a different perspective. The importance of Functionalism in ergonomics, the use of materials and in the manufacturing, methods still prevailed, but in addition to this, young Finnish designers focused on the aesthetic questions (Joensuu-Mamadou 1984, 31). In 1980 conventional Modernism was not yet set to be speculated in critical or ironic perspective (Sassi 1985, 202). At this point, the progress towards a new style in design was questioned mostly in discussions. For instance, an article “In search of new shapes” published in the periodical Design in Finland: 1985 pondered how the well-known design trends of Finnish design – importance on economical use of materials and functional features – had recently been searching for an expedition for contemporary silhouettes, slightly spiced up with humor (Joensuu-Mamadou 1985, 60). Taskinen expressed in Muoto magazine in 1983, that she found the present time was making everything possible for the designer, giving a freedom to create and break borders in order to enter the forbidden area of design (Frilander 2015). Tasa (2020) remembers himself assimilating the freedom of Post-Modernism as inspiring and portrayed it as stepping aside from the mainstream of architecture.

Possu

Architect Denise Scott Brown (b. 1931) introduced the term and acronym PoMo. She describes in her editorial “Our postmodernism” that separation of Post-Modernism – or “PM,” as she calls – and PoMo was a consequence which took place after an exhibition *Signs of Life* held together with her husband and architect Robert Venturi in 1976. According to rumors, architect Philip Johnson (1906–2005) would have found the exhibition inspiring for his own “PM”. However, Johnson’s viewpoint on Post-Modernism was very disparate and made Brown name his style as PoMo (Brown 2011, 110). She called PoMo a “*limp*” whereas for her and Venturi, Post-Modernism was a way of making architecture: “*We do Postmodernism, Philip Johnson does PoMo. It doesn't have all that thought behind it and it doesn't even have the thought about aesthetics that we've done behind it*” (Brown in Howarth 2015b). Brown referred to the aesthetics of PoMo, which she described faulty as regards the realms of cultural preparation, design capability and architectural expertise (Brown 2011, 110).

The term PoMo is derogatory and sarcastic. A Finnish equivalent to PoMo was Possu (literally translated as “pig”). Possu represented a kitschy and ironic Post-Modernist style and it was considered contemptuous. The characteristic, pink color of the animal itself was observable in the clinker cladded building facades popular at the time. Possu was seen as a pejorative abbreviation of the word Post-Modernism (Tasa 2020). Taskinen (1987, 9) agrees that humor had a distinctive role in 1980s design. As reported by Sassi (1985, 123), humor aimed to avoid formal and ceremonial attitude towards design. Both PoMo and Possu bore the irony in mind. They can be seen as a counterpunch to the criticism which Post-Modernism received by triggering the ideology and style in

an even more powerful and radical way. However, the etymologies and meanings of these two concepts vary. PoMo was a statement against Johnson’s style and his view on Post-Modernism, which even led Venturi not to call himself a Postmodernist. This PoMo approach was more personal than the Finnish Possu, which was an overall word for the distinctive style of Finnish Post-Modernism. For instance, in an article by Taide magazine Possu was described as Post-Modernism, which was just a single “style” that some people were “doing” (Rautio 2010).

3.2 Memphis in Finland

In the 1980s, when Memphis was beginning its first exhibitions in Milan, Finnish Post-Modernism was only at the beginning of its peak. The interest towards Italian, high-end design was growing. Soon, Memphis would arrive at Finland for a visit to inspire Finnish Post-Modern interior architecture.

Funktio brings Italian design

Funktio was a furniture design store established by interior architect Alli Syvänoja (1929–2014) in 1968. The store was located in two addresses in Helsinki, in Lönnrotinkatu and Fredrikinkatu. Syvänoja had dreamt of having her own designer furniture store ever since she had become familiar with the business through her father, who owned a store himself. However, Syvänoja claims in an interview that *“I am not a good businesswoman. I am not an artist either, but there is a sort of gallerist in me.”* (Syvänoja in Myllyneva, 1990). Funktio became the first company in Finland distributing Italian design, including furniture, lighting and small goods (Kajander 2020). Funktio was especially esteemed by designers who praised Funktio as the best design store in Helsinki with the

best Italian and international design available (Larros, 2000). At Funktio, the clientele varied from private individuals to architects, interior architects and designers. Advertising agencies and headquarters of different companies were also among the most important customers. One of Funktio’s biggest furniture buyers was Design Museum (Kajander 2020).



Fig. 62

Eva Kajander, the former manager of the Funktio store in Lönnrotinkatu, recalls that Funktio’s ideology was to only acquire furniture that they themselves found appealing. This may have had an impact on the fascinating outlook of the Funktio store: a gallery-like, almost “scarily astonishing” space that both lay customers and designers found inspiring (Kajander 2020). Funktio was described as a sacred space for the students of interior architecture; you were first only able to glimpse it behind a window, but once you had the courage to step inside, you saw the extraordinary space with objects you had only seen on the pages of Domus magazine. Funktio connected both Finnish designers and consumers with the international design discussion and culture. This simultaneously encouraged professionals to step on new, venturesome and unique spatial design solutions (Karhunen 2014, 34).



Fig. 63

Memphis in Helsinki

For at least two decades, Syvänoja's Funktio exhibited artistically high-quality, innovative design and arranged international designer visits to Finland (Karhunen 2014, 34). Probably the most extraordinary and spectacular one of these was by Ettore Sottsass in November 1984. The idea for inviting Sottsass to Finland came at the Milan Design Week in 1981 when Memphis presented its first collection. Funktio, represented by Syvänoja and Kajander, was also present at the exhibition and it was a very remarkable experience. Syvänoja and Kajander launched the planning of a Memphis exhibition at Funktio, but the best moment for it had to be arranged in such a way that Sottsass could visit the exhibition opening himself (Kajander 2020).

Sottsass's visit and the opening of the Memphis exhibition took place at Funktio's Lönnrotinkatu store on the 30th of November 1984. Sottsass attended the event with his wife Barbara Radice. Among the guests was also designer Tapio Wirkkala, a good friend of Sottsass (Kajander 2020). The exhibited Memphis collection consisted of furniture, lighting and smaller objects, such as ceramics. For example, Michele De Lucchi's First chair, Lido sofa and Kristall & Fortune tables, Super lamp by Martine Bedin and various ceramics by Sottsass were presented. In addition, some silk bows with Memphis' patterns and ties were sold (Kajander 2020). The overall visit of Ettore Sottsass and Barbara Radice lasted for a few days. Funktio had arranged a discussion panel where



Fig. 64

professionals had an opportunity to ask questions from Sottsass. They also did some sightseeing in Helsinki in an Alfa Romeo, as the car company was one of the main sponsors of Sottsass's visit. The exhibition was well received by the visitors. The colorful Memphis furniture and whimsical design drew attention, and many people – both ordinary and professionals – came to see the interesting objects in the store. Kajander (2020) recalls how people often described that the ambience was like being in an art exhibition.



Fig 65: Ettore Sottsass posing together with Alli Syvänoja at Funktio's Memphis exhibition. Alli is wearing a tie with Memphis laminate pattern.



Fig 66: Tapio Wirkkala and Ettore Sottsass at Funkio's Memphis exhibition. Wirkkala and Sottsass were close friends.

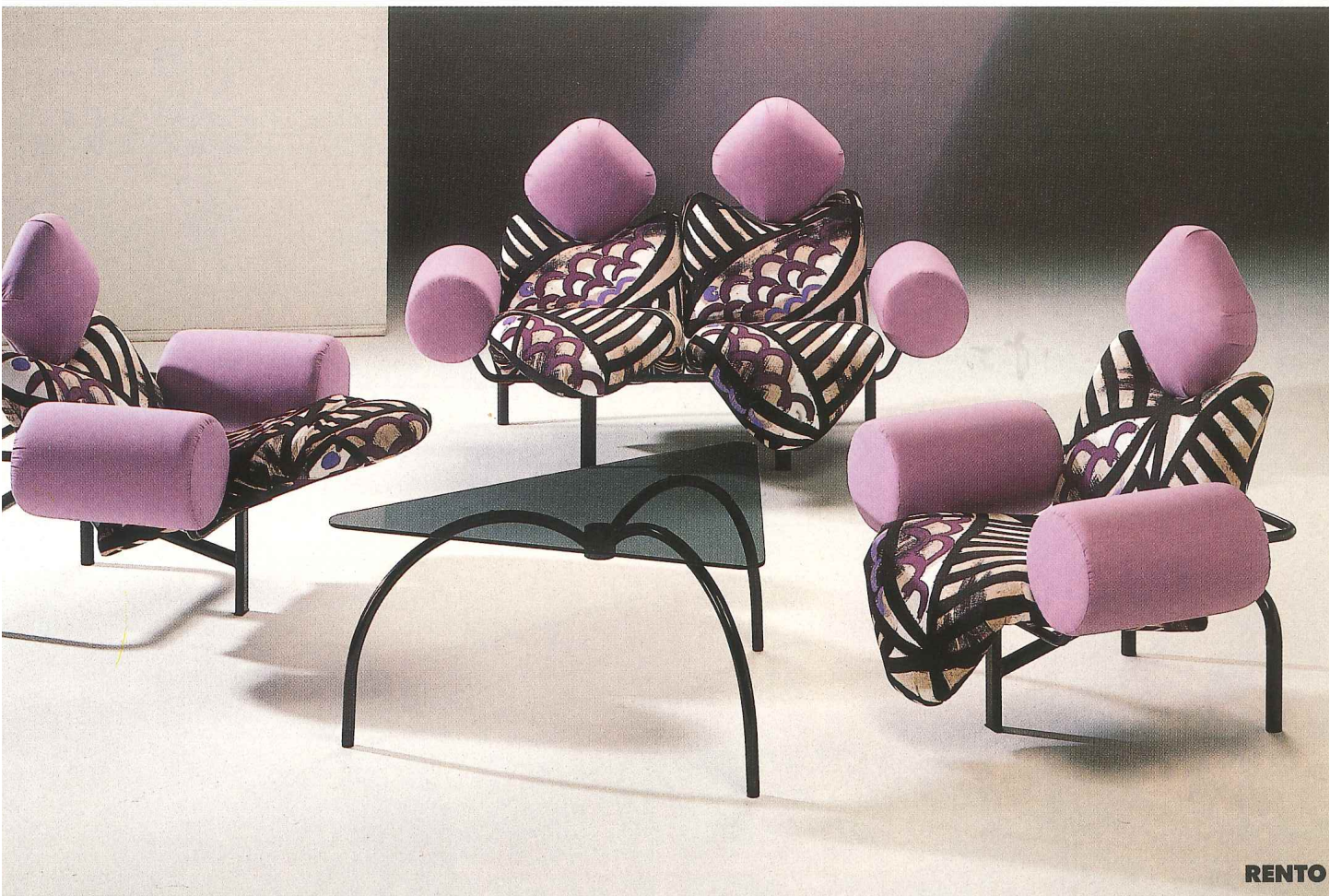
3.3 Post-Modernism and Consumerism

Finland witnessed steep economic growth and increasing consumerism in the 1980s, and the infamous waterbeds flood into the furniture market. However, Finnish furniture design, which had risen its status along with Post-Modernism, offered a more balanced and prestigious choice for these wobbly mattresses.

The popularity of Post-Modernism in Finnish consumer culture

Finnish manufacturers, such as Proforma, Inno, Avarte, and many others, produced Post-Modern furniture created by Finnish interior architects. Many companies were also dedicated to specific designers. In some of them, the designer was even the leader of the manufacturer. Rita Taskinen led Proforma in collaboration with her husband; Avarte was mainly producing furniture by interior architect Yrjö Kukkapuro; and Inno had collections by interior architect Jouko Järvisalo. The companies were frequently showcased in the Design in Finland periodicals and Rita Taskinen's books about interior and furniture design (Kodin Huonekalu ja Sisustuskirja). The manufacturers were presented together with other furniture suppliers which made it

easy for the readers to get in touch with the companies. Although not all the manufacturers and suppliers delivered design furniture, their style was mostly distinctively Post-Modern.



Post-Modernism and economic growth were not seen in the spotlight by everyone. Interior architect Kaisa Blomstedt (1947–2017) recalls in a television interview that the money-booming of the 1980s ruined design in Finland. She clarifies that the ruling mindset was based on the idea of buying new pieces which recklessly contradicted with the idea of creating any bond or meaning with the object. She adds: *“Marriages were breaking apart. It felt like people were changing their partners as fast as they changed their interiors”* (Sommar 2009).

Fig. 67 “Rento” sofa suite by a Finnish manufacturer Pho-Valmiste Ky. The furniture represent clearly Finnish Post-Modernism made for consumers.

Memphis on a wish list?

It is interesting to see how in some of the old, Finnish advertisements from the 1980s and 1990s, Memphis furniture is on the background as a small detail. For instance, in *Design in Finland 1987* (1987, 24), a Finnish company Metsä-Serla is showing their kitchen fixtures in an advertisement, which is spiced up with the First chair (1983) by Michele De Lucchi for Memphis. When looking at the image, it is essential to focus on the chair first instead of the grayscale kitchen cupboards with a few "shocking" yellow-colored cabinets. The First chair was the most popular Memphis furniture also at Funktio. The store was frequented especially by marketing agencies, and they also composed the most significant customer group using the Memphis furniture (Kajander 2020).

Post-Modernism in Finnish homes in the 1980s and 1990s was a more complicated subject. This may be explained by the fact that it is hard to clearly define Post-Modernism since it is such a diverse matter. According to Kajander (2020), customers favored other Italian design brands, such as *Cassina* and *Zanotta* more than Memphis. These companies may not be seen as Post-Modern as Memphis, but their collections included slightly unusual shapes, which differed from their original lines. These companies, such as Zanotta, endorsed their design with features adopted from Memphis. However, Sottsass was also a designer of Zanotta himself, which might have implemented to the Memphis characteristics (Kajander 2020).

WOOD IS OUR DESIGN MEDIUM

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Fig. 58

Photo: Ultima Serla Kitchen

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3.4 The Three Post-Modern Musketeers

Finland has a variety of examples of Post-Modernist architecture and design. When Modernism was collapsing in the late 1970s, Finnish architecture absorbed new international ideas. Due to economic growth and accelerating consumerism, the demand for new buildings increased: headquarters, shopping malls, daycare centers, and other public centres were built. To get a deeper understanding of the Finnish, Post-Modern interior architecture and the possible influence of Memphis, I will now proceed with three case studies that, in my view, represent Finnish Post-Modernism most evidently. These examples – Bepop Shopping Centre, Sinikello Kindergarten and Paimio Parish Centre – will introduce the main characteristics of Finnish Post-Modernism in terms of architecture, furniture and spatial design.

Bepop Shopping Centre





Fig. 70

Bepop Shopping Centre (1989) in Pori, designed by Nurmela-Raimoranta-Tasa (now Architects NRT), has the most distinctive image of Post-Modernist architecture in Finland. Their competition entry “BePOP” was the winning proposal of an invitational competition held by Regional Cooperative Bank of Pori (Porin Seudun Osuuspankki) in 1984, whose own headquarters were to be located in the building. According to the principal architect Jyrki Tasa (2020), they wanted to create an attractive building and to design an interesting competition proposal with a distinctive, curved, glass-roofed shopping gallery that extended from the entrance through the whole building. The overall architectural design of Bepop was breaking the norms of the current style in Finnish architecture, which still followed the rectangular shapes of Modernism. The spatial capacity of the shopping centre was very efficient, which made it simultaneously aesthetically engaging and rationally functional. The original proposal was quite different in contrast to the completed building in 1989, which was not as modest as the submitted proposal. Nevertheless, the jury perceived it as an open-minded and peculiar architectural composition (Tasa 1990, 80–81). When the building was inaugurated in 1989, it represented a diverse style of architecture in Finland, especially for a city like Pori, where most of the building stock derived from the 1960s–1970s.



Fig. 71



Fig. 72



Fig. 73

As I visited Bepop in February, the building looked colossal. The main entrance is massive, with its canopy laying on top of towering pillars. This composition creates a monumental feeling when stepping into the Bepop shopping gallery. At the vestibule, the large tubes blowing hot air resemble monumental torches in a prehistoric temple. Inside, the curved gallery is colorful: the concrete walls are glazed by several layers of translucent paint with shades of cyan and blue, varying from robin's egg to celestial. The width of the gallery changes and divides the space into smaller areas. The entrance to the bank headquarters is located at the fullest part of the shopping gallery, and it pops up with an orange, curving wall which encircles the staircase inside the bank.



Fig. 74

My Tour de Bepop begins from the bank hall, where one can see to the very top of the ceiling from the round lobby. The lighting feels a little dimmed, and the overall ambience in the space is tranquil. Fixed furniture, such as seating and tables, are made of brass, chrome and dark wood, covered with black leather upholstery. The furniture materials, especially the chromatic metal, give an impression of the 1980s banking culture, and the several meters high pillars with green plants on the top give the sort of an ambience of an ancient Greek palace. Similar materials are used in the loose

furniture pieces – for example, in the Bepop chairs, which are designed by Tasa. The chair had various prototypes, and according to Tasa (2020), the model with three legs was suitable for the 1980s and enhanced the zeitgeist of the whole decade. The layout of colors follows the color scheme of the shopping gallery. The same orange shade is inside the bank lobby, and walls are light blue, yet the stairs look like black marble and the atrium has a red tone.



Fig. 75



Fig. 76



Fig. 77

Contrast and manifoldness of materials are present throughout the building. When I stand on the bridge of Bepop on its top floor, I have a complete overview of the interior in front of my camera. However, photography is somewhat challenging; capturing an overall view takes time because Bepop's interior is exceptionally detailed. Wherever I am facing my lens, the desire to capture even the tiniest details is present. The whole picture is still great to photograph. There are even more colors, the most dominant being bright red, which surrounds

the stairs and the wall. The stairs are also enhanced with lighting, which is custom-made for Bepop. The lighting looks like a giant leaf covered with slices of mirrors. Unfortunately, I visited Bepop in the daytime, so the lights were not on. However, the mirror-like surfaces were reflecting daylight, and this made the lighting to spice up the interior and look like sculptural elements more than lamps. My visit to Bepop was an adventure of spotting Finnish Post-Modernism and its exuberant appearance.



Sinikello Kindergarten



Fig. 79

Post-Modernism appeared distinctively in environments designed for children. Sinikello Kindergarten, designed by architect Kari Virta (1932–2014) in 1987, shows an exceptional case of Post-Modernism. Sinikello Kindergarten was designed to fill out the daycare needs of the staff of Kuopio University Central Hospital in the neighborhood. Located on a small hillside, Sinikello consists of three building units that connect to one another (Arkkitehtitoimisto Kari Virta 1989, 42–43). In two of them are the home areas for the children in different age groups; each of the units has their own small play area in the yard. The third building unit is dedicated to shared facilities. The building complex is responding well with the needs of the children as the scale is small and on the level of a child. Sinikello epitomizes a Post-Modern building in a significant way: it is playful, it has beautiful pastel colors and structures, including small towers and manifold of window shapes (Museum of Finnish Architecture 2019).



Fig. 80

As in several Post-Modern buildings, the fixed furniture in Sinikello is custom-designed for the space. This furniture includes, among other things, the daybeds and wardrobes. The interior is filled with colors, such as yellow, turquoise and red – similar to the colors of Bepop. The colors are also used in the details, such as on the doors and the cabinets. Probably the most interesting part of Sinikello's interior is the water playroom, which has pastel-colored clinkers in pink and mint green. The space is also furnished with at least two bathtubs,

also cladded in ceramic tiles. The area is divided into a metallic structure that lays on top of four pillars. A similar system, where the steel pillars and tubes are laying on top of oversized concrete posts, can also be seen outside of the passages towards the entrances to each building.



Fig. 81

The large playroom, which also works as an auditorium, has a fireplace and a wide, semi-round window. The colors are almost identical to the Vanna Venturi House (1964), the first housing project designed by Robert Venturi. Sinikello is an excellent example of the freedom Post-Modernism gave for Finnish architects in the 1980s. In Finnish Architectural Review, Sinikello and other kindergartens were shown as the irresistible adventure playground for architects to play with colors and shapes. All in all, Sinikello Kindergarten is the most orthodox and purest example of Finnish Post-Modernism (Taipale 1989, 26–29).



Fig. 82

Paimio Parish Centre





Fig. 84

In addition to kindergartens and shopping centres, other communal buildings were also being built in the 1980s, including chapels and parish centres. The designs for the new Paimio Parish Centre were first published in *The Finnish Architectural Review* in 1982, where the architects, Käpy (b. 1947) and Simo (b. 1944) Paavilainen presented their proposal for the invitational competition; and the designs were completed in 1984. The building itself is situated as a link between the old rectory and former parish centre (Paavilainen 1982, 66–67). Paimio Parish Centre is the oldest of my three examples of Finnish Post-Modernism and compared to Sinikello or Bepop, Paimio Parish Centre is the most composed building concerning both architectural design and interiors. It is also the smallest by the floor area. While stepping into the Centre, I walk under a canopy, which looks like a drape. The first sight ahead after entering the space is an open lobby space. The natural light enters the space from semi-circular windows, which remind me of Robert Venturi. Similar window type is also shown in Sinikello Kindergarten.



Fig. 85

The two parish halls of the Parish Centre have cooler color tones, and space is lighted with large windows near the ceiling. The overall look of the spaces is calm but structured with black and white furniture. The tables with white plastic laminate surface and slightly curving legs have been designed for the building. The main parish hall has painted, folding screens fixed on the walls, and they also work as storage space. The folding screens are painted with turquoise and cyan, and the pattern is wavy, slightly organic. Another interesting detail in both main and smaller parish halls is the lighting. The suspended lights have been

placed around the space, and they consist of three light sources that face upwards. Because the building is a sacral space, there is also furniture made for ecclesiastical ceremonies. In addition to all furniture, the main hall has foldable furniture, which has a similar design to the tables. A podium for preach or speeches is present, together with a small font stand for baptizing rituals.



Fig. 86



Fig. 87



Fig. 88

The lobby has a small seating area, and the walls are made from similar, yellowish tiles as the façade; this is supposed to give an impression of an exterior space (Paavilainen 1985 39; Taipale 1989, 28). This vision is supported by dark, teal-colored ceiling with small lights resembling a night sky with stars. The lobby gives access to the chapel and to the primary and small parish halls that are used for gathering and happenings. The lobby itself continues as a narrowing hallway, which leads to the office spaces. In addition to the yellowish walls and high sky ceiling, the furniture of the

Parish Centre is both designed for the space and ordered from a furniture distributor. The dark red coat racks have a distinctive shape and they are custom-made. The frames are quite dominant details of the space, but, at the same, they create a sort of a rhythm while continuing towards the hallway and office spaces at the back of the building. The coat racks also work as space dividers when the seating lounge is placed right on the front of the first rack. Kari Asikainen has designed the “Kari XU” connectable lounge chairs in the seating area, but not specifically for Paimio Parish Centre



Fig. 89

3.5 The influence of Memphis in Finnish Post-Modern Interior Architecture

When Modernism had ruled over Finnish design and architecture for decades, the Post-Modern epoch was notwithstanding somewhat limited. However, the advantage was passionately taken, and the results were experimental with the mentality of ‘full steam ahead’. Finnish Post-Modern architecture shined with the great shopping centres and playful kindergartens, town halls and parish centres. Interior architecture was focused on furniture design instead of interiors as a whole. Various tentative explorations on furniture were made, which had a characteristic appearance that could be associated with the Memphis Group. Memphis has been acknowledged in Finnish design and architecture. However, in terms of design, Post-Modernism was spoken under one’s breath; it gave an impression of an unofficial description of a design concept. It was preferred to speak of “experimental design” (Kalin 2015).

A brief analysis of Memphis in the Post-Modern examples

The Post-Modern examples presented in this thesis indicate that Memphis might have given some encouragement for Bepop, Sinikello and Paimio Parish Centre. Bepop is showing elements which relate to Memphis, such as the dominant colors in the spaces together with changing scales of forms, including the large plant holders in the gallery area. Similar play with volumes was also shown in Memphis objects, such as their oversized, geometric seating designs. Memphis explored new materials in their furniture, especially plastic laminate. Bepop, on the other hand, studied and tested different ways to handle colored, concrete surfaces. Tasa (2020) recalls, however, that Memphis was recognized, but it did not act as a specific source of inspiration in the



projects. The furniture, especially the characteristic Bepop chair and lighting, are presenting the concept of freedom in design, which was a cornerstone of Memphis Group. Paimio Parish Centre, on the contrary, is low-key and does not show Post-Modernism in similar perspective and, most importantly, details considering Memphis are not noticeable when comparing to Bepop. The Parish Centre reminds of Venturi instead of Memphis, and the Parish Centre does not exemplify similar drive for experimentation as Bepop does. However, the Parish Centre may establish a landmark for the beginning of Finnish Post-Modernism, as Venturi’s house in 1964.

Sinikello Kindergarten settles in between Bepop and Parish Centre, with its colorful, but systematic color scheme and fixed furniture design, which are not reaching the experimental and bold design. All three examples have features that may have been influenced by Memphis, but a very straightforward and clear expression of Memphis is nonexistent. The absence of Memphis in architectural design may be explained by the common lack of the Post-Modern mannerism, including irony or exaggeration. The Finnish Post-Modernism is a combination of rules of Modernism and Classicism (Taipale 1989, 29–30)



Fig. 91

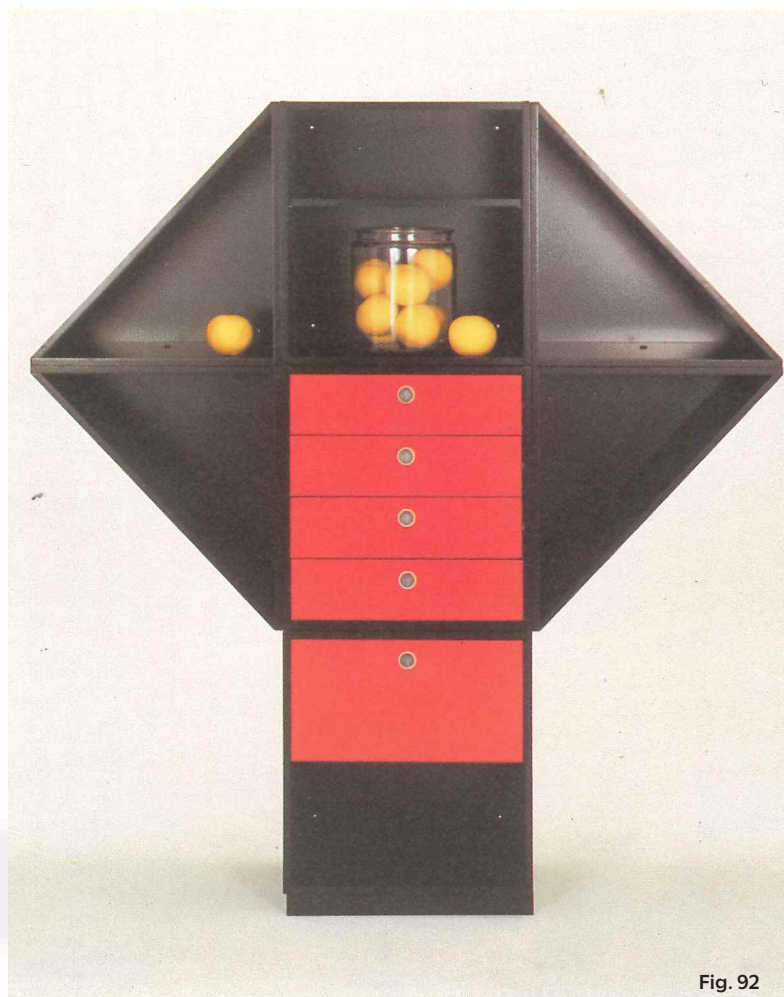


Fig. 92

Finnish Post-Modernism and Memphis

Finnish interior architects and designers were educated during the Modernist period and they were taught to follow the aesthetics of Functionalism together with Minimalist approach towards the design processes. Modernism had been considered as the original and appropriate style to follow for decades. The debate about the distinctiveness of Finnish design emerged when Post-Modernism opposed the functionalist principles of Finnish design. The questions about characteristic and eccentric Finnish design began to be examined together with the discussion of Post-Modernism (Takala-Schreib 2000, 5). Hence, in the late 1980s, some Finnish designers began to address Post-Modernism more seriously (Bennes 2015). The freedom of design that Post-Modernism gave enabled possibilities for experimentation and an ability to break the ice. The more experimenting approach reminded of the beginning of 1980 when Memphis was being formed in Milan.

The search for new shapes had begun to formulate more tangible when the designers began to experience the possibilities of Post-Modernism. The turning point of the 1980s design and architecture questioned the mindset of the Finnish, Modernist “good taste” which highlighted neutrality. During this general transition phase, there had been purposeful attempts to break the rules of good taste by a cheeky use of colors and neglecting the functionality of the objects (Taskinen 1989, 22). For example, interior architect Yrjö Kukkapuro’s style was changing from functional and minimal in the late 1970s towards more experimental design. He declared: *“I had designed Functionalist furniture for public spaces so unlimitedly, that I had done my part in it!”* (Kukkapuro in Frilander, 2017).

However, the Finnish interior architects had made various tentative explorations on furniture, which have broken the rules of Functionalism. That is where the Post-Modernism was shown as the most visible, and most of the interior architects designed a garish chair (Kalin 2015). Even though Memphis does not occur in the discussion about Finnish Post-Modernism literally, there are objects which represent Memphis style by their features. For instance, Kukkapuro’s *Experiment* series tested wobbly and colorful elements on seating, and *Vino* and *Cloud* chairs show the playfulness of details and ergonomics. Jouko Järvisalo’s *Mondi* line amused with its dynamic shapes and customizing variations, and *Kiss* by Rita Taskinen presented a witty, bit kitschy chair with plump red lips as a backrest. Bird-like *Scaragoo* lamp by Stefan Lindfors (b. 1962) was equipped with a haptic dimmer and bestial features, which later went on a production for Ingo Maurer (Ilonen 1989, 20). Pirkko Stenros’ (b. 1928) geometric, table design series *Duetto* was selected as the Furniture of the Year in 1987, and two years before she presented a modular shelving system for manufacturer Muurame (Finnish Foreign Trade Association 1987, 52; Joensuu-Mamadou 1985, 62).



Fig. 93

The acceptance of Memphis

Even though interior architects included Post-Modern features in their design, Memphis did not contribute significantly in Finnish design or architectural dialogue. According to Tasa (2020), the theory of architecture regarding Post-Modernism was not specifically studied. Instead, Post-Modernism was shown clearly in international, architectural publications, which were used as the main inspirational source for Finnish Post-Modern architecture. The lack of knowledge on Post-Modern theories could also be the reason why Memphis never reached such high status among Finnish designers. In 2015, Design Museum in Helsinki held an exhibition on Post-Modernism, showing the design in both international and domestic perspectives – including Memphis objects and Finnish Post-Modernism from the designers mentioned previously. However, the overall view on the Finnish Post-Modernism in interior architecture and furniture design was shown as an experimental period in the history of Finnish Design. For instance, Harry Kivilinna, the curator of the Post-Modernism exhibition at the Design Museum, thought that the designers made tests, but the results were not as substantial as Modernist, Finnish design. *"The entrenched view here was that designers did not want to give up their modernism"* (Kivilinna in Bennes 2015). Even though Post-Modernism was not shown as distinctively as Modernism or Functionalism in Finnish design, the free and creative approach which Post-Modernism endowed mentally was more valuable at the end than Post-Modern aesthetics.

4.1 An overview reflection of the research process

In this thesis, I have examined Post-Modernism within Finnish Post-Modern interior architecture through the phenomenon and design theory of the Memphis Group. Besides, I studied and presented three examples of Finnish Post-Modernism and analyzed the characteristics of these spaces. Furthermore, I have researched the possible similarities and differences between Finnish Post-Modernism and the Memphis Group. The research questions were the following: What kind of phenomenon Memphis was? How is the influence of Memphis shown Finnish Post-Modern interior architecture?

Finnish architecture and design had been jammed since the 1970s, and shortly began to accept the new style along with the economic growth. The expanding, financial progress did affect the Finnish design and architecture, but it was also shown on the side of manufacture. Domestic, even family businesses, were highly productive in their furniture manufacturing businesses, and similar kinds of companies were the manufacturers of the furniture in the Post-Modern examples; Bepop, Paimio Parish Centre and Sinikello Kindergarten. Post-Modernism was adapted to the Finnish architectural discussion from the United States at the turn of the 1980s. In the beginning, the overall attitude towards Post-Modernism was skeptic since Functionalism was considered as the accepted, folkloristic and orthodox ideology of Finnish architecture and design. The negative mindset towards Post-Modernism was a result of association with the United States, and Post-Modernism was tried to be sidestepped and neglected. This similar way of thinking applied with Sottsass himself: he rejected Post-Modernism and claimed that it does not communicate with reality (Sudjic 2015, 176). Nevertheless, does Memphis communicate with reality, then?

In light of my findings, the Finnish Post-Modern interior architecture is not substantially related to the Memphis Group on a theoretical level. A direct affiliation between Finnish Post-Modern interior architecture and the Memphis design theory is not concrete or affirmed. However, it is difficult even to find a specific method for Memphis since they did not have standard or stylistic principles to follow in their design – they wanted to become anti-ideological. The Finnish Post-Modern interior architecture has a spectrum of features, which indicate the possibility of Memphis acting as an inspiration for the designers. Colors, playfulness, and experimental approach on the design process are shown in furniture design, but the final result is not as exuberant when compared to Memphis’ design. Nevertheless, one must bear in mind that in Finnish interior architecture, Post-Modernism is most evident in furniture design. The spatial design was limited, and it was more common for an architect to design the interiors as a whole.

Even though the Nordic countries were mostly dedicated to Modernism and Functionalism, Finland was more exceptional by its courage to step out of the comfort zone. Finnish Post-Modernism was found confusing in the Nordic countries and rose discussion. Because the Finnish design and architecture used to be seen as puritanical and discreet, Forum magazine (4/1991) had made an article about Bepop Shopping centre with a headline questioning if it even is Finnish architecture (Tasa 2020). This shows indications of Finnish Post-Modernism having a slight, phenomenal status in the Finnish design and architecture in the other Nordic countries. The way Finnish design and architecture have provoked in the Nordics could be seen as a Memphis phenomenon on a much smaller scale. Still, this refers more to architecture instead of spatial or furniture design. Post-Modern architecture’s larger scale and identifiable style is easier to recognize than furniture in lobby, and big picture easier to perceive and experience.

Based on these thoughts, I therefore conclude that Memphis was a phenomenon that was eye-catching and caused debate. Finnish Post-Modern interior architecture is not substantially related to the Memphis Group on a theoretical level, but physical elements indicate that Memphis was a possible source of inspiration. Also, Finnish Post-Modern interior architecture focused more on furniture design instead of spatial design. The Post-Modern furniture and spatial design are overshadowed by Post-Modern architecture.

4.2 Post-Modernism and my career as an interior architect

It has been an interesting and inspiring adventure to study the topic of Finnish Post-Modernism in interior architecture and its relationship with the Memphis Group. For me, the opportunity to research something which is not yet examined.

I wish, that Post-Modernism is making a revival to both architecture and design. Currently, the influence of Post-Modernism is beginning to appear, for instance in restaurant design and some contemporary spaces, such as showrooms. The color schemes and furniture may sometimes indicate this new, Post-Modern wave of inspiration. However, Memphis is not exactly visible currently, but slightly appears in design on a detail-based level. For instance, a restaurant project designed by the Helsinki-based Design Office KOKO3 has applied Sottsass's Bacterio pattern as a wallpaper in a new restaurant Madonna in Helsinki.

I find Post-Modernism highly interesting and aesthetically appealing. I think that Post-Modernism can give cheer to trust in one's own design and give a chance to break the ice. I very much hope, that this thesis will inspire architects, interior architects, designers – or anyone interested in Post-Modernism and Memphis Group. I wish this study encourages for further research.



Fig. 94

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Photography credits

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|------------|--|
| Fig. 62-66 | Sottsass’s visit in Finland. 1984. Photography by Timo Viljakainen. Image courtesy of Timo Viljakainen. |
| Fig. 69-77 | Bepop Shopping Centre. 2020. Photography by Venla Rautajoki. |
| Fig 79-82 | Sinikello Kindergarten. 2010. Photography by Anni Vartola. Retrieved 10.5.2020. Available at:< https://www.flickr.com/photos/125605950@N02/with/14739265730/ > |
| Fig. 83-89 | Paimio Parish Centre. 2020. Photography by Venla Rautajoki. |
| Fig. 90 | Bepop Shopping Centre. 2020. Photography by Venla Rautajoki. |

Figures

| | |
|---------|---|
| Fig. 01 | Woman in blazer. Retrieved 9.5.2020. Available at: < https://supermodelshrine.tumblr.com/post/7351976762/cindy > |
| Fig. 02 | Memphis furniture. Retrieved 8.5.2020. Available at: < https://www.mobeldesignmuseum.se/news/new-exhibition-1980s > |
| Fig. 03 | Ira Kurlander House in San Francisco. Retrieved 10.5.2020. Available at: < http://alisudol.com/ira-kurlander-house-san-francisco/ > |
| Fig. 04 | Now Gallery WALALA X Play. Retrieved 9.5.2020. Available at: < https://www.camillewalala.com/latest-work/2019/1/15/now-gallery-walala-x-play > |
| Fig. 05 | Faye Toogood interior. Retrieved 9.5.2020. Available at: < https://www.sightunseen.com/2010/04/faye-toogood-stylist-and-creative-director/ > |
| Fig. 06 | John Outram Pumping Station. Photography: Reid & Peck / RIBA Collections. Retrieved 8.5.2020. Available at: < https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/may/06/john-outram-postmodernist-british-architect-interview--john-soane > |
| Fig. 07 | Vanna Venturi House by Robert Venturi. Retrieved 10.5.2020. Available at: < https://www.archaic-mag.com/magazine/tag/USA > |
| Fig. 08 | Pruitt-Igoe. Photography by Pruitt-Igoe Myth. Retrieved 8.5.2020. Available at: < https://www.archdaily.com/153704/the-pruitt-igoe-myth-an-urban-history/ > |
| Fig. 09 | Llewelyn Park by Robert A.M. Stern. Photography: Norman McGrath / Phaidon. Retrieved 9.5.2020. Available at: < https://www.curbed.com/2020/2/20/21138331/postmodernism-architecture-charles-moore-phaidon > |
| Fig. 10 | Österreichisches Verkehrsbüro by Hans Hollein. Retrieved 9.5.2020. Available at: < http://www.hollein.com/eng/Architecture/Chronology/1970-1979/Oesterreichisches-Verkehrsbuero > |
| Fig. 11 | Hans Hollein’s Façade at La Strada Novissima. Photography: Courtesy of Paolo Portoghesi Retrieved 8.5.2020. Available at: < https://www.artribune.com/progettazione/architettura/2019/01/mostra-strada-novissima-paolo-portoghesi-maxxi-roma/ > |
| Fig 12. | Hans Hollein’s Façade at La Strada Novissima. Photography: Courtesy of Paolo Portoghesi Retrieved 8.5.2020. Available at: < https://www.artribune.com/progettazione/architettura/2019/01/mostra-strada-novissima-paolo-portoghesi-maxxi-roma/ > |

| | |
|---------|---|
| Fig. 13 | Façade of Venturi, Rauch & Scott Brown at La Strada Novissima. Photography: Courtesy of Paolo Portoghesi. Retrieved 8.5.2020. Available at: < https://www.artribune.com/progettazione/architettura/2019/01/mostra-strada-novissima-paolo-portoghesi-maxxi-roma > |
| Fig. 14 | Portrait of Ettore Sottsass. Photography: Armin Linke. In: Thomé, Philippe. 2014. Sottsass. p. 374. |
| Fig. 15 | Portrait of Ettore Sottsass. Photography: Bruno Gecchelin. Retrieved 9.5.2020. Available at: < https://lestanzedelvetro.org/ricerca/ettore-sottsass-il-vetro-3/ > |
| Fig. 16 | Sottsass’s drawings from 1938. In: Radice, Barbara. 1993. Ettore Sottsass Critical Biography. p. 8–9. |
| Fig. 17 | Opening of “Menhir, Ziggurat, Stupas, Hydrants and Gas pumps” exhibition in Milan 1967. Photograph: Courtesy Galerie Bruno Bischofberger. Retrieved 9.5.2020. Available at: < https://www.theguardian.com/books/gallery/2014/may/18/influential-designs-ettore-sottsass-in-pictures > |
| Fig. 18 | Sottsass’s notes and drawings. Photography: Erik & Petra Hesmberg Courtesy CSAC Parma / Courtesy Studio Ettore Sottsass. In: Thomé, Philippe. 2014. Sottsass. p. 31. |
| Fig. 19 | Sottsass in India 1988. Photography: Courtesy Studio Ettore Sottsass. Retrieved 10.5.2020. Available at: < https://www.metropolismag.com/design/sottsass-affair-india-is-little-known-vital/ > |
| Fig. 20 | Offerta a Shiva collection. Retrieved 9.5.2020. Available at: < https://i.pinimg.com/originals/79/2b/ea/792bea5c386ab757b96c942e65d9d038.jpg > |
| Fig. 21 | Olivetti Valentine 1969. Photography: Alberto Fioravanti. Retrieved: 9.5.2020. Available at: < https://www.christies.com/features/Hooked-on-vintage-typewriters-8513-1.aspx?sc_lang=en#FID-8513 > |
| Fig. 22 | Olivetti ELEA 9003 mainframe. Photography: Andries Van Onck Archiv. Retrieved 9.5.2020. Available at: < https://www.villaromana.org/front_content.php?idcat=193&idart=595&lang=2 > |
| Fig. 23 | Detail of Olivetti ELEA 9003 mainframe. Photography: Elisabetta Mori. Retrieved 9.5.2020. Available at: < https://spectrum.ieee.org/tech-history/silicon-revolution/the-italian-computer-olivettis-elea-9003-was-a-study-in-elegant-ergonomic-design > |
| Fig. 24 | Sottsass’s sketches. Photography: Erik & Petra Hesmberg Courtesy CSAC Parma/Courtesy Studio Ettore Sottsass. In: Thomé, Philippe. 2014. Sottsass. p. 31. |
| Fig. 25 | Ettore Sottsass on a Superbox 1966. Photography: Giuseppe Pino/Contrasto, 1979. Retrieved 10.5.2020. Available at: < https://www.macguffinmagazine.com/stories/story2 > |

Fig. 26 Gufram GOD Drocco/Mello + TOILETPAPER. Photography: Gufram. Retrieved 10.5.2020. Available at: <<https://www.gufram.it/en/prodotto-31-god>>

Fig. 27 Gufram Pratone by Ceretti, Derossi & Rosso. Photography: Gufram. Retrieved 10.5.2020. Available at: <<https://www.ribaj.com/culture/home-futures-design-museum>>

Fig. 28 Lassu Chair 1974 Alessandro Mendini. Retrieved 10.5.2020. Available at: <<https://designersforhumanity.com/2019/02/24/radical-design/>>

Fig. 29 Quaderna Console tables by Superstudio for Zanotta 1971. Photography: Image courtesy of Zanotta. Retrieved 10.5.2020. Available at: <<https://www.pamono.com/designers/superstudio>>

Fig. 30 Superonda by Archizoom. Photography: Courtesy of Archizoom. Retrieved: 10.5.2020. Available at: <<https://divisare.com/authors/2144776344-archizoom-associati>>

Fig. 31 Casabella n.371/1972. Photo by Alessandro Mendini. Retrieved 10.5.2020. Available at: <http://archivio.archphoto.it/2011/02/11/emanuele-piccardo_clip-stamp-fold/>

Fig. 32 Studies for Italy: New Domestic Landscape. Photography: Erik & Petra Hesmberg Courtesy CSAC Parma/Courtesy Studio Ettore Sottsass. In: Thomé, Philippe. 2014. Sottsass. p. 233.

Fig. 33 Exhibition poster of Italy: The New Domestic Landscape. Retrieved 10.5.2020. Available at: <<https://flashbak.com/paleofuture-highlights-italy-new-domestic-landscape-1972-58436/>>

Fig. 34 Living Module by Ettore Sottsass for MoMA. Photography: MAK / Georg Meyer. Retrieved 10.5.2020. Available at: <https://www.domusweb.it/en/news/2014/05/16/mak_design_lab.html>

Fig. 35 Tahiti lamp on Superstudio table. Photography: Coke Bartrina. Retrieved 10.5.2020. Available at: <<http://cokebartrina.com/villa-lena/>>

Fig. 36 Le strutture tremano (Ettore Sottsass Jr). Photography: Giancarlo Maiocchi. Retrieved 10.5.2020. Available at: <<http://www.artnet.com/artists/giancarlo-maiocchi/le-strutture-tremano-ettore-sottsass-jr-4YR9qPQNXYvto2l6glrA7g2>>

Fig. 37 Memphis Carlton room divider in an exhibition. Photography: Fabrizio Stipari. Retrieved 10.5.2020. Available at: <<https://www.wallpaper.com/design/memphis-revival-the-1980s-design-movement-gains-fresh-momentum-with-new-shows-and-fashion-collections>>

Fig. 38 Memphis logos 1982–1983. By Christoph Radl and Valentina Grego. In: Radice, Barbara. 1985. Memphis: Research, experiences, results, failures and successes of new design. p. 82.

Fig. 39 Cover of the book Memphis, The New International Style 1981. Design by: Electa. In: Radice, Barbara. 1985. Memphis: Research, experiences, results, failures and successes of new design p. 83

Fig. 40 Record player. Retrieved 10.5.2020. Available at: <<https://3dwarehouse.sketchup.com/collection/466cedfd-407f-489f-90a7-d399e9cb41d0/record-of-vinyl>>

Fig. 41 First Chair by Michele De Lucchi. Retrieved 10.5.2020. Available at: <https://www.yoox.com/uk/58000882TL/item#dept=women&sts=sr_women80&cod10=58000882TL&sizeId=1&sizeName=>>

Fig. 42 Memphis group in Tawaraya boxing ring. Photography: Studio Azzurro. Retrieved 10.5.2020. Available at: <<https://www.yatzer.com/memphis-plastic-field>>

Fig. 43 Treetops lamp in an exhibition. Photography: Fabrizio Stipari. Retrieved 10.5.2020. Available at: <<https://www.wallpaper.com/design/memphis-revival-the-1980s-design-movement-gains-fresh-momentum-with-new-shows-and-fashion-collections>>

Fig. 44 Tahiti lamp in a car. Photography: Courtesy of Memphis Milano. Retrieved 10.5.2020. Available at: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BWZ8EI3AsT-/>>

Fig. 45 Memphis furniture. Photography: Courtesy of Memphis Milano. Retrieved 10.5.2020. Available at: <<https://www.facebook.com/memphismilano/photos/our-brand-new-memphispost-design-showroom-largo-treves-5-milan-is-getting-ready-/1780047692006725/>>

Fig. 46 Invitation to Memphis exhibition in 1981. Graphic design: Luciano Paccagnella. In: Radice, Barbara. 1985. Memphis: Research, experiences, results, failures and successes of new design. p. 4–5.

Fig. 47 Sottsass's drawings of lamps 1981. Design: Ettore Sottsass. In: Radice, Barbara. 1985. Memphis: Research, experiences, results, failures and successes of new design. p. 62–63.

Fig. 48 Sottsass's drawings of lamps 1981. Design: Ettore Sottsass. In: Radice, Barbara. 1985. Memphis: Research, experiences, results, failures and successes of new design. p. 62–63.

Fig. 49 Study for Casablanca cupboard 1981. Photography: Erik & Petra Hesmberg Courtesy CSAC Parma / Courtesy Studio Ettore Sottsass. In: Thomé, Philippe. 2014. Sottsass. p. 304.

Fig. 50 Beverly furniture by Sottsass 1981. Photography Aldo Ballo, Guido Cegani, Peter Ogilvie / Collezione Memphis Milano. In: Thomé, Philippe. 2014. Sottsass. p. 305.

Fig. 51 Post Design Gallery the Memphis Showroom. Photography: Memphis Milano. Retrieved 9.5.2020. Available at: <<https://www.memphis-milano.com/pages/salone-del-mobile-2016>>

Fig. 52 Plastic laminate “Spugnato” for Memphis by Ettore Sottsass 1979. Retrieved: 10.5.2020. Available at: <<https://theeyehasit.com/2017/09/22/memphis/>>

Fig. 53 Plastic laminate “Rete 2” for Memphis 1983. Designed by: Ettore Sottsass. In: Radice, Barbara. 1985. Memphis: Research, experiences, results, failures and successes of new design. p. 33.

Fig. 54 Plastic laminate “Argilla” for Memphis 1982. Designed by: Michael Podgorschek. In: Radice, Barbara. 1985. Memphis: Research, experiences, results, failures and successes of new design. p. 33.

Fig. 55 Plastic laminate “Isole” for Memphis 1982. Designed by: Christoph Radl. In: Radice, Barbara. 1985. Memphis: Research, experiences, results, failures and successes of new design. p. 28.

Fig. 56 Bacterio Laminate by Ettore Sottsass 1978. Retrieved 9.5.2020. Available at: <<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/759731>>

Fig. 57 Karl Lagerfeld’s residence in Monte Carlo with Beverly furniture 1981. Photography: Jacques Schumacher (Copyright Mode & Wohnen). In: Radice, Barbara. 1985. Memphis: Research, experiences, results, failures and successes of new design. p. 72.

Fig. 58 Karl Lagerfeld in his Monte Carlo residence 1981. Photography: Jacques Schumacher (Copyright Mode & Wohnen). In: Radice, Barbara. 1985. Memphis: Research, experiences, results, failures and successes of new design. p. 73.

Fig. 59 “Lippu/Flag” chair by Rita Taskinen for Proforma. In: Taskinen, Rita. 1987. Kodin Huonekalu ja Sisustuskirja 1987–1988. p. 45.

Fig. 60 Tampella Habit textile advertisement 1986. In: Finnish Foreign Trade Association. 1986. Design in Finland: 1986. p. 5.

Fig. 61 Post-Modernism exhibition in Design Museum Helsinki, 2015. Photography: Design Museum. Retrieved 10.5.2020. Available at: <<https://www.designmuseum.fi/en/exhibitions/postmodernism-1980-1995/>>

Fig. 67 “Rento” sofa suite by Pho-Valmiste Ky. In: Taskinen, Rita. 1989. Kodin Huonekalu ja Sisustuskirja 1989–1990. p. 37.

Fig. 68 Metsä-Serla advertisement with First chair by Michele De Lucchi 1987. In: Finnish Foreign Trade Association. 1987. Design in Finland: 1987. p. 24.

Fig. 78 Sinikello Kindergarten. VPL Architects. Retrieved 10.5.2020 Available at: <<http://www.vpl.fi/?portfolio=sinikello>>

Fig. 91 “Kiss” chair by Rita Taskinen for Proforma, 1982. Photography: R. Träskelin. Retrieved 9.5.2020. Available at: <<https://twitter.com/designmuseofi/status/716546334845747200>>

Fig. 92 Modular storage unit by Pirkko Stenros for Muurame 1985. In: Finnish Foreign Trade Association. 1985. Design in Finland: 1985. p. 62.

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Fig. 95 Tahiti lamp in a car. Photography: Courtesy of Memphis Milano. Retrieved 10.5.2020. Available at: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BWZ8EI3AsT-/>>

Cover: Memphis logo by Valentina Grego, 1983. In: Radice, Barbara. 1985. Memphis: Research, experiences, results, failures and successes of new design. London, United Kingdom: Thames and Hudson. p. 82.

1. Interview

Kajander, Eva. 2020. Interview on Finnish Post-Modernism.
Interviewed by Venla Rautajoki. [via email] Helsinki, Finland, 17.4.2020.

Teemat ja kysymykset

1. Haastateltavan ajatuksia postmodernismista

- Mitä postmodernismi merkitsee haastateltavalle
- Postmodernismi suomalaisessa suunnittelussa 1980-1990 -luvuilla

2. Funktio

- Haastateltava kuvailee Funktiota
- Funktio ja postmodernismi

3. Funktio ja Memphis

- Ensimmäisten Memphis -kalusteiden saapuminen Funktioon
- Millaisen vastaanoton Memphis sai
- Mistä ajatus Memphisin kalusteiden maahantuontiin lähti liikkeelle
- Memphisin kalusteiden esillepano Funktiossa

4. Ettore Sottsassin vierailu Suomessa

- Vierailun ajankohta, lähtökohdat, kesto
- Millaisen vastaanoton Sottsass sai
- Kävikö Sottsass Funktiossa
- Oliko Sottsass tietoinen, että Memphisin kalusteita myytiin Funktiossa

5. Funktion asiakaskunta

- Ketkä olivat Funktion asiakkaita
- Memphisin kalusteiden suosio
- Postmodernit designkalusteet suomalaisissa kodeissa 1980-1990 -luvuilla

2. Interview

Tasa, Jyrki. 2020. Interview on Finnish Post-Modernism.
Interviewed by Venla Rautajoki. [via FaceTime call] Helsinki, Finland, 24.4.2020, 11:00.

Teemat ja kysymykset

1. Haastateltavan ajatuksia postmodernismista

- Postmodernismin määritelmä
- Postmodernismi suomalaisessa suunnittelussa
- Sisustusarkkitehtuuri ja postmodernismi

- Mitä postmodernismi merkitsee haastateltavalle?
- Mitä ilmaisu “possu” tarkoitti?

2. Bepop (1989)

- Haastateltava kuvailee Bepopia
- Värimaailma, materiaalit
- Bepopin ja pankin kalusteet
- Mikä toimi inspiraationa Bepopin tila- ja kalustesuunnittelussa?
- Millaisen vastaanoton Bepop sai?

3. Memphis-ryhmä

- Haastateltavan käsitys Memphis-ryhmästä

- Oliko Memphis ajankohtainen aihe tai inspiraation lähde 1980-1990 -luvuilla suomalaisessa suunnittelussa?

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